

PAST MASTERS

239

Edgar Wallace
E. W. Hornung
Robert E. Howard
Robert Louis Stevenson
H. P. Lovecraft
Sumner Locke
Jacques Futrelle
E. Phillips Oppenheim
Edward Dyson

and more

PAST MASTERS 239

Produced and Edited by Terry Walker from short stories in magazines, newspapers and other sources, and all in the Life + 70 years public domain.

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1: Armor Around Me

Louis Arthur Cunningham

1900-1954

Australian Women's Weekly 19 Dec 1936

Prolific Canadian novelist and short story writer

ACROSS the Tennis Club's floor Ishbel saw Denis Strong, and the hundreds of faces, the swaying forms of the dancers, became white blurs above wavering reeds— and only Denis's strong's face stood out, dark and clear and well-remembered.

He had come back and she had seen him once more, just as she had known he was bound to return and that she would see him again.

Out of that dim, shifting mirage of faces he looked at Ishbel, his eyes captured hers, held hers, but she seemed to see in his look, not the recognition of remembrance, only the swift bowing to beauty that had ever been characteristic of him.

She tore her gaze from his. She forced herself to smile brightly at Jeremy Dean, who came to claim his dance. She was glad to see them all about her, her many friends, glad to have again the consolation that always there were men about her a barricade of men built up during the years that Denis Strong had been away.

She had no need to be afraid of Denis. She had worked deliberately to be strong against him, to be far beyond his hurting. She felt his dark, reckless eyes upon her as she drifted away in Jeremy's arms, but she did not answer his look with one of challenge. She ignored him.

For Ishbel knew that her sister Margot still kept Denis Strong's photograph in her box among her treasures, that Rosemary, her other sister, still had a little packet of faded letters, tied with blue ribbon, faded, too, that Denis once had written her. She knew likewise that when her sisters looked at their own husbands—fine fellows though these were—they changed for both of them into the dark, smiling, and glamorous figure that was Denis Strong.

One could not forget Denis. He defied all forgetting, let him forget whom he would.

Ishbel had been not quite seventeen that summer when she had first met him. Ishbel had been all legs and arms and blue eyes like young irises in color, and yellow hair like sunlight on wheat; and she had had a tremendous capacity for worship. It was worship— simply that— the humble, utter surrender of a very young priestess at the shrine of a very great god— that Ishbel Royce had given to Denis. To her, as to everyone, he had been charming and gentle; yet his eyes seemed to smile for her alone, his voice seemed to address only her.

And that night—the night before he went away— she had met him as he strode through the garden under the moon after saying good-bye to Margot and Rosemary. He had stopped suddenly on the white paved path by the fountain at the end of the garden— had stopped and stared at Ishbel, all in white and moonlight and mist.

And: "Are you real?" he had asked softly "Are you—"

He had stopped close to her, so tall, so big above her, and his gentle finger touched her chin and tilted her face up to his, and for a moment his eyes shone into hers.

"One dreams." he whispered, "of meeting such as you in gardens when the moon is bright; one hopes, but only to me has it been given to live such a moment—"

And because he could say things like that quite easily and naturally; because it was very, very easy for Ishbel to believe, since she wanted so much to believe she had lifted her arms and twined them about his neck and clung to him. Her eyes were closed, her golden lashes lay on her cheeks, and she was dead and gone to heaven— until she awoke bitterly, to the firm grip of his hands on her shoulders and felt him putting her away from him.

He had said only one word "Child!"— and had walked away and forgotten her.

But Ishbel remembered; Ishbel would always remember. And Ishbel would never let him or any other man hurt her as she had been hurt that night. Nothing was worth such pain. She thought: "I can never feel as I felt in that moment. And he probably smiled as he walked away and whistled a tune and at once forgot."

AND now she saw him dancing with Rosemary. She saw in Rosemary's grey dark lashed eyes a brighter gleam, and a warmth unwonted in Rosemary's smile, in the way her hand lay upon his shoulder. She thought of Rosemary keeping his letters all these years; wondered if Rosemary was recapturing some of those dreams that were rapture. And Margot was next in his arms— dark, silent Margot who had taken his going away harder, Ishbel knew, than Rosemary. Margot felt hurt deep inside her; Rosemary used to cry sometimes.

But time had worked its magic, and first one of the Royce sisters had walked up the aisle and come down on a husband's arm: then soon the other. And there was left only Ishbel, who had neither wept nor given way to spells of moodiness, who had neither pictures nor letters to remember him by, but only the knowledge of a kiss denied.

She had thought of Denis then in love with Margot and Rosemary, if he really was in love, as the mariner who seeks to make his way between Scylla and Charybdis, who escaping one, must needs come to grief upon the other. And she had once teased him about that, and advised him to plot a middle course between

the dangerous rocks. "And you will be my star to steer by?" he had said, laughing and did not stop when Ishbel said gravely: "Yes. I will be your star to steer by."

ALL so long ago. All forgotten now. Margot's photograph was turning yellow and the ink of Rosemary's letters was fading and soon would be only dim lines on ancient paper; but Ishbel's memento was one that did not dim or fade. For seventeen is such a lonely age, such a hideous age to find young hope destroyed, to be called "Child," when the heart is all but a woman's heart, and could be at his command

Now, out of all these musings, she was taken gently. Denis was by her side asking her to dance.

But there he was, the music had begun again, and she was in his arms, and he was looking gravely down at her. She smiled faintly, looked at him with doubtful questioning eyes, as one looks at a person whom one should know but doesn't quite. So she made him feel as a stranger, till a look of puzzlement, of doubt, too, came into his eyes.

She had done as she had planned for years to do: She had put him at once in the place she had kept in mind for him. They met— she thought of the sad old song— "but met as strangers met"— while all the while a voice of long ago whispered in her heart, of a garden and a moon and silver mist, and his lips close to hers.

"The penalty of advancing years," he said and beneath the lightness of his tone she sensed something hurt. "You don't remember me, Ishbel. And after all, why should youth remember, to whom the fleeting years—"

"Ah, I know." She lowered her gaze, then lifted her lids and looked squarely into his eyes. "You're Methuselah. I didn't place you until you began to talk about years."

"Unkind."

He shook his head and she noted a tinge of silver at the temples, faint in the blackness of his hair. Something jerked at her heart then. Life was short. She had always felt its shortness, its preciousness, the beauty that there is all too little time to enjoy. Five years from that life—

She was smiling over his shoulder, which she could barely do— smiling at a boy she knew well.

"Are you still the little classical scholar, in pigtails and pinafores?" She felt him look gravely at her behind his quick, gay smile.

"Sir!" She opened her eyes very wide. "I never wore either; and as regards the classics—"

"Don't tell me you have forgotten— Scylla and Charybdis and—"

"Oh, now I do remember!" Ishbel smiled brightly and thought what an excellent impromptu liar she was.

The one thing that might have got her, that might have caused a quaver to come into her voice or a mist to cloud her eyes—a single allusion to their meeting in the garden—that, of course, he did not mention. Forgotten, all that, unknown, uncared for, the shame of a young girl who finds herself abruptly put aside and callously dismissed.

"You were at one and the same time." she said. "Margot's big moment and Rosemary's, and you reminded me of a navigator trying to get through the straits, and I predicted that if you escaped Margot (Scylla), you'd be caught by Rosemary (Charybdis). I was a cheeky young thing; it's a wonder you didn't rebuke or even chastise me. Denis Strong!"

"Ah, so you really know my name! I bet you've only just thought of it!"

"Well, you don't think I've been murmuring it in the form of a litany for— how long is it since you went away?"

He looked at her steadily, searchingly, almost accusingly. She lowered her gaze. She hummed a few bars of the music. She thought, "I can't stand this much longer. I thought it'd be fun to punish him. but— but it kind of hurts one, too."

"It's five years or fifty, Ishbel." said Denis softly. "Or centuries. And it has done so much, that long age."

"To whom? To-to me? To you?" "Wait! One at a time, if you please. Well, it has given you time to grow your wings."

"You still talk as you used to, Denis. It hasn't changed your methods at all— as I remember them."

"I wonder." He looked at her whimsically, and shook his head.

He seemed about to say something very earnest, very serious, for he frowned and she felt the clasp of his arm tighten for an instant. Then the music stopped again and her next partner approached. John Penniston was nearly as young as Ishbel, and fair and very handsome in a sunburned, breezy way. He said:

"Hi, Ishbel. I've been looking for you everywhere!" And he took Ishbel from Denis as from some elderly, gouty gentleman who had been treading on her toes.

SHE saw Denis' broad back and wide shoulders as he made his way through the crowd. He did not immediately dance with anyone, and Ishbel was glad. But he stayed away from her for the rest of the evening; perhaps because there wasn't much chance of getting near her.

Ishbel always had a crowd round her, a regular bodyguard, and it had never been more in evidence than to-night. It was as if they all knew, those gay youngsters who couldn't possibly understand, that to-night she needed their strength, that Denis Strong was back and that she must show Denis that she was as far beyond him now as he had been out of her reach that long-ago night when he had so casually left her and gone his way.

She saw him several times, watching from the fringe of the crowd. She saw, or thought she saw, in his eyes, a questioning, wondering look as if he found in her someone whom he could not understand, someone who was a little too much for him. And she danced more gaily and flirted more outrageously. Contemptuously she put down the brief surge of pity that came to her when she saw him standing there alone. What was his loneliness to her? Somehow, he wasn't the assured, swaggering, all-conquering Denis that he had been. The girls who had smiled for him and sighed for him were mostly married or engaged or gone away, the great majority of the crowd were younger people who knew him only vaguely and were too taken up with their own gay interests to find time to cultivate him.

Before the dance was over, Ishbel found herself whisked away with a dozen or so others, who piled into a couple of cars and drove out to park under the glittering stars, to smoke and dance once more to the tinny music of a gramophone on a lawn by the river.

Ishbel didn't dance. She sat beside John Penniston in the front seat of his car. They smoked quietly and watched the starlight on the mirror surface of the river. The trees were vague, black and formless against the sky. John Penniston's hand covered hers gently and he turned to her and said. "I love you, Ishbel. I know I could never love anyone else so much."

She did not speak. It seemed too much to bear-to-night. So many thoughts filled her mind, crowded into her being, this night. And John had often told her he loved her, as had many others.

BUT John had never spoken like this before; never before looked at her as he was looking now, pleadingly, timidly, as one for whom much would depend upon her answer.

"Don't you care, Ishbel?"

"Of course I care, John, but—"

"Then"—he caught her to him and his lips brushed her hair, her cheek—"you're going to marry me, Ishbel! You do love me!"

And the others came crowding round, laughing and ragging so boisterously that no denial of Ishbel's, had she been able to make one, could have made itself heard. It was all settled for her. Everyone was glad. Everyone seemed so very, very glad that it seemed monstrous for her not to share their rejoicing.

She drove back in a crowded seat and she did not talk. They teased her, told her she was shy, that they had always known she was shy, that John was getting a mouse for a wife.

Margot and Bill Yorke, who now lived some twenty miles away, were spending the week-end at the old house where only Colonel Royce (retired) and Ishbel lived now, though Rosemary lived on the big estate adjoining.

Denis Strong would be staying at Graygables, that had belonged for generations to the family of which he was the last. A bit of a rolling stone. Denis, a haunter of the tropic jungles as well as the Arctic wastes, engineer, aviator, gold hunter, adventurer. They said that he would never settle down, never content himself among the quiet hills of home.

His return now, after so long a time, was a nine days' wonder. He was discussed at luncheon the following day when Margot and Rosemary and their husbands foregathered with Colonel Royce and Ishbel.

"Still the same Denis," Margot said. "He came up to see me and greeted me as if we had seen each other only yesterday."

"YES," agreed Rosemary, "he has a marvellous knack of bridging the gulf of years."

Rosemary's grey eyes challenged Margot's. There had been much bitterness between them when Denis had gone away. With first Margot's marriage, then Rosemary's, they seemed to bury the hatchet; anyway, there wasn't much sense in their quarrelling over Denis, now that they were safely married to such solid men.

Neither of their husbands were very interested in discussing Denis. Good trenchermen both, they were busy with their ample luncheon. And certainly Ishbel did not want to talk about him; but the Colonel, who was far more renowned for tactics than tact, smiled amiably and said, "By gad, he almost caused a war between you two girls! I never thought he'd get clear away."

Ishbel flushed. The Colonel laughed boisterously. Margot said:

"I thought that, as father would say, Ishbel turned all her guns on him last night. How romantic it would be if—"

"Last night," said Ishbel coolly, "I got engaged to John Penniston."

Two knives and forks went down with a mild clatter. The Colonel tried to say, "Well, by gad," but only made a choking noise. And into the succeeding silence walked Denis Strong.

"Ishbel has just thrown a bomb in our midst," said the Colonel, when they had greeted him and when Ishbel was wishing that a large hole would appear in the ground. "Denis, my boy, she tells us she is engaged to John Penniston. These young ones, by gad!"

"I'm— I'm not so very young," said Ishbel, finding it hard to manage her voice, finding it harder still to meet Denis' eyes. But defiantly she did meet his quiet gaze, and calmly enough she said, "Not as young as I was five years ago." She walked away jauntily, trim and slender in green pullover and white skirt: and her yellow hair filled with sunlight and her eyes with pain they could not see.

WHEN she was out of sight she began to run; then she slowed down, and finally stopped to linger at a little bridge that is ever in the shade of the thick high elders growing there. "That's torn it," she said to the darting minnows. "And what about it? I'd have had to get engaged soon, and be married and— it was just a coincidence that it happened when he came home."

She went on her way and played such a hard and driving game of golf that John got very cross— cross enough, anyhow, to have to work so hard that there wasn't time to make love to her. And she was glad. After the match she was first on the verandah for tea, and Denis Strong was standing there, gazing out on the river, looking, Ishbel thought with a little tightening of her throat, just as he had always looked, with a tan achieved by years of living under the sun and the wind beating upon his face.

"Oh, Ishbel!" He smiled at her, rather shyly and with a quiet deference, as if he had surrendered fully to the fact of her being grownup, being above the teasing for which, before, she had been a fair target. "You didn't give me time to congratulate you. It— well, it's a bit of a shock, you know, to find one you thought of as—well, as just a child. But I know you'll be very happy, Ishbel."

Her hand lay in his. She looked in his eyes for a moment, then looked away.

"Do you mean to tell me that you thought of me— as a child— or otherwise— ever?"

He took a step towards her, his fingers tightening on her hands; then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled:

"Of course, one always thinks of one's friends."

"Yes," murmured Ishbel "I suppose so." But she knew he had not thought of that night in the garden, had not remembered it, nor even for a moment realised or stopped to think of what it might have meant to her. "Here's John," she said. And John came, shook hands casually with Denis Strong, then took her away.

She saw very little of Denis in the days that followed. She heard Margot tell Rosemary that it was just another of his flying visits, that it would only last a week or two at the most.

"And I don't think," said Rosemary, a bit smugly, perhaps, "that he's leaving any even partly broken hearts behind him this time. He hasn't gone out of his way to try breaking any. And it isn't as if the old fire were lacking for there's the same devil lurking in his eyes and the same magic on the tip of his tongue. He just seems to lack the will to conquer."

But he came to the club dance the following week and again he was the Denis of old, as gay, as fascinating, as gallant as ever he had been. The girls, the young ones especially, flocked to him now, and Ishbel, in the dressing-room, between dances, heard him discussed, heard plans laid for capture or surrender. He made youngsters like John and Jeremy seem only boys, seem awkward and callous. Laughing, he claimed

Ishbel towards the end of the evening and swung her into the witchery of a waltz. She trembled at his touch. All her strength seemed to be leaving her.

"You're quiet to-night," he said.

"And you're gay," said she.

"Gay, yes. I'm laughing to-night— at myself."

"But why?"

"Oh, it's a story, little Ishbel a long story. Some day when you're older, when I'm very old, I'll tell you. Perhaps when I come back here again I'll tell you."

"You— you're going away?"

"To-night— after the dance is over."

"And—oh, I didn't know." Why couldn't she be casual, indifferent even? He came and he went, Denis— he was always like that.

"I DIDN'T know myself," he said, "till I took stock of things. When I took stock I began to laugh, to see what a fool I had been. I well, you knew it, Ishbel— was the sort of man who thought he wore a suit of chainmail as armor against womankind. Hardboiled, cynical, unromantic Denis— that was I. Then like any chap in a romance or on the films I take one moment that doesn't belong to life and build all my life on that moment. And the world plays havoc with men who do that, Ishbel— women never do it, I think."

"That moment," she began. "I don't—"

"Perhaps someday I'll tell you that, too. I must give you up now." John was at his shoulder. "I'll see you again before I go, perhaps. If not, good-bye—and good luck."

Then he was gone, swallowed up in the crowd and there was a wail in her heart and he didn't even see John or hear him the first time, when he said, "What are you looking so down in the mouth about, Ishbel? You don't look like the woman I have chosen." But when he said it again, almost sullenly, she looked up at him and said, "Oh, John, I'm sorry, but I'm not— not the woman you have chosen. Not at all. I can't be. I don't love you. Let me go now, I must go."

He let her go. He didn't even try to stop her. A bit of the light went out of his eyes, but it would come again, for it hadn't really died— not as she had seen light die in a man's eyes, die and give way to the artificial brightness of a gay spirit.

SHE dodged the crowd, Ishbel, and walked, careless of the dew, of the brambles, of the shell-pink beauty of her gown, across the links and along the path and over the bridge. And she slipped into the moonlight and shadow of her father's garden and flitted down the winding path of silver-white stones to the pool.

A car stopped by the hedge. Ishbel sat back in the shadows. The wicket-gate opened softly to a familiar hand and he came slowly along the walk round the

fountain's rim and stood, gazing about him, as a man who would look long upon a scene the better to impress it on his heart.

Ishbel stood up and walked towards him. He turned. She saw him start, then stand stock-still as he had stood that other night. Then he walked towards her and there they were, face to face, their bodies almost touching. His hands tilted her chin until her eyes looked up into his.

"Last time," he said, "I could not kiss you because you were a child and I thought you could not know what you were doing; this time you're a woman—and you must know—you must, Ishbel! This was the moment I remembered, on which all my life since depended, the moment I wanted again—"

"You have it now, Denis."

Her arms went about his neck, his hands dropped from her shoulders and he held her close and kissed the long lashes resting on her cheek and kissed the parted lips. And there in the garden was stillness broken by the soft voice of the water running in the pool, and the rustle of the leaves, while moon and stars looked down, and they who stood there were as one with each other and as one with all the world.

2: The Black Grippe

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

The Strand Magazine, March 1920

Two years after the great 1918 Spanish 'Flu' epidemic ravaged the world, another, even more terrifying, epidemic comes... Science fiction form Edgar Wallace.

DR. HEREFORD BEVAN was looking thoughtfully at a small Cape rabbit; the rabbit took not the slightest notice of Dr Hereford Bevan. It crouched on a narrow bench, nibbling at a mess of crushed mealies and seemed perfectly content with its lot, in spite of the fact that the bench was situated in the experimental laboratory of the Jackson Institute of Tropical Medicines.

In the young principal's hand was a long porcelain rod with which from time to time he menaced the unconscious feeder, without, however, producing so much as a single shiver of apprehension. With his long ears pricked, his sensitive nostrils quivering— he was used to the man-smell of Hereford Bevan by now— and his big black eyes staring unwinkingly ahead, there was little in the appearance of the rabbit to suggest abnormal condition.

For the third time in a quarter of an hour Bevan raised the rod as though to strike the animal across the nose, and for the third time lowered the rod again. Then with a sigh he lifted the little beast by the ears and carried him, struggling and squirming, to a small hutch, put him in very gently, and closed the wire-netted door.

He stood staring at the tiny inmate and fetched a long sigh. Then he left the laboratory and walked down to the staff study.

Stuart Gold, his assistant, sat at a big desk, pipe in mouth, checking some calculations. He looked up as Bevan came in.

'Well,' he said, 'what has Bunny done?'

'Bunny is feeding like a pig,' said Bevan, irritably.

'No change?'

Bevan shook his head and looked at his watch. 'What time—' he began.

'The boat train was in ten minutes ago,' said Stuart Gold. 'I have been on the 'phone to Waterloo. He may be here at any minute now.'

Bevan walked up and down the apartment, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, his chin on his breast.

Presently he walked to the window and looked out at the busy street. Motor-buses were rumbling past in an endless procession. The sidewalks were crowded with pedestrians, for this was the busiest thoroughfare in the West End of London and it was the hour of the day when the offices were absorbing their slaves.

As he looked, a taxi drew up opposite the door and a man sprang out with all the agility of youth, though the iron-grey whiskers about his chin and the seamed red face placed him amongst the sixties.

'It is he!' cried Hereford Bevan, and dashed from the room to welcome the visitor, taking the portmanteau from his hand.

'It is awfully good of you to come, professor,' he said, shaking the traveller warmly by the hand. 'Ever since I telegraphed I have been scared sick for fear I brought you on a fool's errand.'

'Nonsense,' said the elder man, sharply; 'I was coming to Europe anyway, and I merely advanced my date of sailing. I'd sooner come by the Mauretania than the slow packet by which I had booked. How are you? You are looking bright.'

Hereford Bevan led the newcomer to the study and introduced him to Gold.

Professor Van der Bergh was one of those elderly men who never grow old. His blue eye was as clear as it had been on his twentieth birthday, his sensitive mouth was as ready to smile as ever it had been in the flower of his youth. A professor of pathology, a great anatomist, and one of the foremost bacteriologists in the United States, Bevan's doubts and apprehensions were perhaps justified, though he was relieved in mind to discover that he had merely accelerated the great man's departure from New York and was not wholly responsible for a trip which might end in disappointment.

'Now,' said Van der Bergh, spreading his coat-tails and drawing his chair to the little fire, 'just give me a second to light my pipe and tell me all your troubles.'

He puffed away for a few seconds, blew out the match carefully and threw it into the grate, then before Bevan could speak he said:

'I presume that the epidemic of January has scared you?' Hereford Bevan nodded.

'Well,' said the professor, reflectively, 'I don't wonder. The 1918 epidemic was bad enough. I am not calling it influenza, because I think very few of us are satisfied to affix that wild label to a devastating disease which appeared in the most mysterious fashion, took its toll, and disappeared as rapidly and mysteriously.'

He scratched his beard, staring out of the window.

'I haven't heard any theory about that epidemic which has wholly satisfied me,' he said. 'People talk glibly of "carriers" of "infection", but who infected the wild tribes in the centre of Africa on the very day that whole communities of Eskimos were laid low in parts of the Arctic regions which were absolutely isolated from the rest of the world?'

Bevan shook his head.

'That is the mystery that I have never solved,' he said, 'and never hope to.'

'I wouldn't say that,' said the professor, shaking his head. 'I am always hoping to get on the track of first causes, however baffling they may be. Anyway, I am not

satisfied to describe that outbreak as influenza, and it really does not matter what label we give to it for the moment. You might as truly call it the Plague or the Scourge. Now let's get down to the epidemic of this year. I should like to compare notes with you because I have always found that the reports of this Institute are above suspicion. I suppose it has been suggested to you,' he went on, 'that the investigation of this particular disease is outside the province of tropical medicines?'

Stuart Gold laughed.

'We are reminded of that every day,' he said, dryly.

'Now just tell me what happened in January of this year,' said the professor. Dr Bevan seated himself at the table, pulled open a drawer, and took out a black-covered exercise book.

'I'll tell you briefly,' he said, 'and without attempting to produce statistics. On the 18th January, as near three o'clock in the afternoon as makes no difference, the second manifestation of this disease attacked this country, and, so far as can be ascertained, the whole of the Continent.'

The professor nodded. 'What were the symptoms?' he asked.

'People began to cry— that is to say, their eyes filled with water and they felt extremely uncomfortable for about a quarter of an hour. So far as I can discover the crying period did not last much more than a quarter of an hour, in some cases a much shorter time.'

Again the professor nodded.

'That is what happened in New York,' he said, 'and this symptom was followed about six hours later by a slight rise of temperature, shivering, and a desire for sleep.'

'Just the same sort of thing happened here,' said Bevan, 'and in the morning everybody was as well as they had been the previous morning, and the fact that it had occurred might have been overlooked but for the observation made in various hospitals. Gold and I were both stricken at the same time. We both took blood and succeeded in isolating the germs.'

The professor jumped up.

'Then you are the only people who have it,' he said, 'nobody else in the world seems to have taken that precaution.'

Stuart Gold lifted a big bell-shaped glass cover from a microscope, took from a locked case a thin microscopic slide, and inserted it in the holder. He adjusted the lens, switched on a shaded light behind the instrument, and beckoned the professor forward.

'Here it is, sir,' he said.

Professor Van der Bergh glued his eye to the instrument and looked for a long time.

'Perfect,' he said. 'I have never seen this fellow before. It looks rather like a trypanosome.'

'That's what I told Bevan,' said Stuart Gold.

The professor was still looking.

'It is like and it is unlike,' he said. 'Of course, it is absurd to suggest that you've all had an attack of sleeping sickness, which you undoubtedly would have had if this had been a trypanosome, but surely this bug is a new one to me!'

He walked back to his chair, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe. 'What did you do?'

'I made a culture,' said Bevan, 'and infected six South African rabbits. In an hour they developed the first symptoms. Their eyes watered for the prescribed time, their temperature rose six hours later, and in the morning they were all well.'

'Why South African rabbits?' asked Van der Bergh, curiously.

'Because they develop secondary symptoms of any disease at twice the rate of a human being— at least that has been my experience,' explained Bevan. 'I found it by accident whilst I was in Grahamstown, in South Africa, and it has been a very useful piece of knowledge to me. When I wired to you I had no idea there were going to be any further developments. I merely wanted to make you acquainted with the bug—'

The professor looked up sharply. 'Have there been further developments?' he asked, and Bevan nodded.

'Five days ago,' he said, speaking slowly, 'the second symptom appeared. I will show you.' He led the way back to the laboratory, went to the little hutch, and lifted the twisting, struggling rabbit to the bench under a blaze of electric light. The professor felt the animal gingerly.

'He has no temperature,' he said, 'and looks perfectly normal. What is the matter with him?' Bevan lifted the little beast and held his head toward the light.

'Do you notice anything?' he asked.

'Good heavens!' said Van der Bergh; 'he's blind!'

Bevan nodded.

'He's been blind for five days,' he said. 'But—'

Van der Bergh stared at him. 'Do you mean—'

Bevan nodded.

'I mean, that when the secondary symptom comes, and it should come in a fortnight from today.'

He stopped.

He had replaced the animal upon the bench and had put out his hand to stroke his ears when suddenly the rabbit groped back from him. Again he reached out his hand and again the animal made a frantic attempt to escape.

'He sees now,' said the professor. 'Wait,' said Bevan.

He took down a board to which a paper was pinned, looked at his watch, and jotted a note. 'Thank God for that,' he said; 'the blindness lasts for exactly one hundred and twenty hours.'

'But do you mean,' asked Van der Bergh, with an anxious little frown, 'that the whole world is going blind for five days?'

'That is my theory,' replied the other.

'Phew!' said the professor, and mopped his face with a large and gaudy handkerchief. They went back without another word to the study and Van der Bergh began his technical test. For his information sheet after sheet of data were placed before him. Records of temperature, of diet and the like were scanned and compared, whilst Bevan made his way to another laboratory to examine the remaining rabbits.

He returned as the professor finished.

'They can all see,' he said; 'I inspected them this morning and they were as blind as bats.' Presently the professor finished.

'I am going down to our Embassy,' he said, 'and the best thing you boys can do is to see some representative of your Government. Let me see, Sir Douglas Sexton is your big man, isn't he?'

Bevan made a wry face.

'He is the medical gentleman who has the ear of the Government,' he said, 'but he is rather an impossible person. He's one of the old school—'

'I know that school,' said the professor, grimly, 'it's a school where you learn nothing and forget nothing. Still, it's your duty to warn him.'

Bevan nodded and turned to Stuart Gold.

'Will you cancel my lecture, Gold?' he said; 'let Cartwright take the men through that demonstration I gave yesterday. I'll go down and see Sexton though he wither me!'

Sir Douglas Sexton had a large house in a very large square. He was so well-off that he could afford a shabby butler. That shrunken man shook his head when Dr Bevan made his enquiry.

'I don't think Sir Douglas will see you, sir,' he said. 'He has a consultation in half an hour's time and he is in his library, with orders that he is not to be disturbed in any circumstances.'

'This is a very vital matter and I simply must see Sir Douglas,' said Bevan, firmly. The butler was gone for some time and presently returned to usher the caller into a large and gloomy room, where Sir Douglas sat surrounded by open books.

He greeted Bevan with a scowl, for the younger school were not popular with the Sextonians.

'Really, it is most inconvenient, doctor, for you to see me at this moment,' he complained, 'I suppose you want to ask about the Government grant to the

Jackson Institute. I was speaking to the Prime Minister yesterday and he did not seem at all inclined to agree to spend the country's money.

'I haven't come about the grant, Sir Douglas,' replied Bevan, 'but a matter of much greater importance.'

In as few words as possible he gave the result of his experiment, and on the face of Sir Douglas Sexton was undisguised incredulity.

'Come, come,' he said, when Dr Bevan had finished, and permitted his heavy features to relax into a smile. 'Now, that sort of stuff is all very well for the Press if you want to make a sensation and advertise your name, but surely you are not coming to me, a medical man, and a medical man., moreover, in the confidence of the Government and the Ministry of Health, with a story of that kind! Of course, there was some sort of epidemic, I admit, on the 18th. I myself suffered a little inconvenience, but I think that phenomena could be explained by the sudden change of wind from the southwest to the north-east and the corresponding drop in temperature. You may have noticed that the temperature dropped six degrees that morning.'

'I am not bothering about the cause of the epidemic,' said Bevan, patiently. 'I am merely giving you, Sir Douglas, a rough account of what form the second epidemic will take.'

Sir Douglas smiled.

'And do you expect me,' he asked with acerbity, 'to go to the Prime Minister of England and tell him that in fourteen days the whole of the world is going blind? My dear good man, if you published that sort of story you would scare the people to death and set back the practice of medicine a hundred years! Why, we should all be discredited!'

'Do you think that if I saw the Prime Minister—' began Bevan, and Sir Douglas stiffened.

'If you know the Prime Minister or have any friends who could introduce you,' he said, shortly, 'I have not the slightest objection to your seeing him. I can only warn you that the Prime Minister is certain to send for me and that I should give an opinion which would be directly contrary to yours. I think you have made a very grave error, Dr Bevan, and if you were to take the trouble to kill one of your precious rabbits and dissect it you would discover another cause for this blindness.'

'The opinion of Dr Van der Bergh,' began Bevan, and Sir Douglas snorted.

'I really cannot allow an American person to teach me my business,' he said. 'I have nothing to say against American medicines or American surgery, and there are some very charming people in America— I am sure this must be the case. And now, doctor, if you will excuse—'

He turned pointedly to his books and Bevan went out.

For seven days three men worked most earnestly to enlist the attention of the authorities. They might have given the story to the Press and created a sensation, but neither Bevan nor Van der Bergh favoured this method. Eminent doctors who were consulted took views which were extraordinarily different. Some came to the laboratories to examine the records. Others 'poohpoohed' the whole idea.

'Have you any doubt on the matter yourself?' asked the professor, and Bevan hesitated.

'The only doubt I have, sir,' he said, 'is whether my calculations as to the time are accurate. I have noticed in previous experiments with these rabbits the disease develops about twice as fast as in the human body, but I am far from satisfied that this rule is invariable.'

Van der Bergh nodded.

'My Embassy has wired the particulars to Washington,' he said, 'and Washington takes a very serious view of your discovery. They are making whatever preparations they can.'

He went back to his hotel, promising to call on the morrow. Bevan worked all that day testing the blood of his little subjects, working out tables of reaction, and it was nearly four o'clock when he went to bed.

He slept that night in his room at the Institute. He was a good sleeper, and after winding the clock and drawing down the blind he jumped into bed and in less than five minutes was sound asleep. He awoke with the subconscious feeling that he had slept his usual allowance and was curiously alive and awake. The room was in pitch darkness and he remembered with a frown that he had not gone to bed until four o'clock in the morning. He could not have slept two hours.

He put out his hand and switched on the light to discover the time. Apparently the light was not working.

On his bedside table was a box of matches, his cigarette holder, and his cigarettes. He took the box, struck a light, but nothing happened. He threw away the match and struck another— still nothing happened.

He held the faithless match in his hand and suddenly felt a strange warmth at his fingertips. Then with a cry he dropped the match— it had burnt his fingers!

Slowly he put his legs over the edge of the bed and stood up, groping his way to the window and releasing the spring-blind. The darkness was still complete. He strained his eyes but could not even see the silhouette of the window-frame against the night. Then a church-bell struck the hour...nine, ten, eleven, twelve!

Twelve o'clock! It was impossible that it could be twelve o'clock at night. He gasped. Twelve midday and dark!

He searched for his clothes and began to dress. His window was open, yet from outside came no sound of traffic. London was silent— as silent as the grave.

His window looked out upon the busy thoroughfare in which the Jackson Institute was situated, but there was not so much as the clink of a wheel or the sound of a pedestrian's foot.

He dressed awkwardly, slipping on his boots and lacing them quickly, then groped his way to the door and opened it. A voice outside greeted him. It was the voice of Gold.

'Is that you, Bevan?'

'Yes, it is I, what the dickens—' and then the realization of the catastrophe which had fallen upon the world came to him.

'Blind!' he whispered. 'We're all blind!'

Gold had been shell-shocked in the war and was subject to nerve-storms. Presently Bevan heard his voice whimpering hysterically.

'Blind!' he repeated. 'What a horrible thing!'

'Steady yourself!' said Bevan, sternly. 'It has come! But it's only for five days, Gold. Now don't lose your nerve!'

'Oh, I sha'n't lose my nerve!' said Gold, in a shaky voice. 'Only it is rather awful, isn't it? Awful, awful! My God! It's awful!'

'Come down to the study!' said Bevan. 'Don't forget the two steps leading down to the landing. There are twenty-four stairs, Gold. Count 'em!'

He was half-way down the stairs when he heard somebody sobbing at the foot and recognized the voice of the old housekeeper who attended to the resident staff. She was whimpering and wailing.

'Shut up!' he said, savagely. 'What are you making that infernal row about?'

'Oh, sir,' she moaned. 'I can't see! I can't see!'

'Nobody can see or will see for five days!' said Bevan. 'Keep your nerve, Mrs Moreland.' He found his way to the study. He had scarcely reached the room before he heard a thumping on the door which led from the street to the staff quarters. Carefully he manœuvred his way into the hall again, came to the door, and unlocked it.

'Halloa,' said a cheery voice outside, 'is this the Jackson Institute?'

'Thank God you're safe, professor. You took a risk in coming round.' The professor came in with slow, halting footsteps, and Bevan shut the door behind him.

'You know your way, I'll put my hand on your shoulder if you don't mind,' said Van der Bergh. 'Luckily I took the trouble to remember the route. I've been two hours getting here. Ouch!'

'Are you hurt?' asked Bevan.

'I ran against an infernal motor-bus in the middle of the street. It had been left stranded,' said the professor. 'I think the blindness is general.'

Stuart had stumbled into the room soon after them, had found a chair and sat down upon it.

'Now,' said Van der Bergh, briskly, 'you've got to find your way to your Government offices and interview somebody in authority. There's going to be hell in the world for the next five days. I hope your calculations are not wrong in that respect, Bevan!'

Hereford Bevan said nothing.

'It is very awkward!' it was Gold's quivering voice that spoke, 'but, of course, it'll be all right in a day or two.'

'I hope so,' said the professor's grim voice. 'If it's for five days little harm will be done, but— but if it's for ten days!'

Bevan's heart sank at the doubt in the old man's voice. 'If it's for ten days?' he repeated.

'The whole world will be dead,' said the professor, solemnly, and there was a deep silence.

'Dead?' whispered Gold and Van der Bergh swung round toward the voice.

'What's the matter with you?'

'Shell-shock,' muttered Bevan under his breath, and the old man's voice took on a softer note.

'Not all of us, perhaps,' he said, 'but the least intelligent. Don't you realize what has happened and what will happen? The world is going to starve. We are a blind world, and how shall we find food?'

A thrill of horror crept up Bevan's spine as he realized for the first time just what world-blindness meant.

'All the trains have stopped,' the professor went on; 'I've been figuring it out in my room this morning just what it means. There are blind men in the signal-boxes and blind men on the engines. All transport has come to a standstill. How are you going to get the food to the people? In a day's time the shops, if the people can reach them, will be sold out and it will be impossible to replenish the local stores. You can neither milk nor reap. All the great power-stations are at a standstill. There is no coal being got out of the mines. Wait, where is your telephone?'

Bevan fumbled for the instrument and passed it in the direction of the professor's voice. A pause, then:

'Take it back,' said the professor, 'of course, that will not be working. The exchange cannot see!'

Bevan heard a methodical puff-puff and the scent of tobacco came to him, and somehow this brought him comfort. The professor was smoking.

He rose unsteadily to his feet. 'Put your hand on my shoulder, professor, and, Gold, take hold of the professor's coat or something.'

'Where are you going?' asked Van der Bergh. 'To the kitchen,' said Bevan; 'there's some food there and I'm starving.' The meal consisted in the main of dry bread, biscuits, and cheese, washed down by water. Then Hereford Bevan began his remarkable pilgrimage.

He left the house, and keeping touch with the railings on his right, reached first Cockspur Street and then Whitehall. Half-way along the latter thoroughfare he thumped into a man and, putting out his hand, felt embossed buttons.

'Halloa,' he said, 'a policeman?'

'That's right, sir,' said a voice; 'I've been here since the morning. You're in Whitehall. What has happened, sir? Do you know?'

'It is a temporary blindness which has come upon everybody,' said Bevan, speaking quickly. 'I am a doctor. Now, constable, you are to tell your friends if you meet them and everybody you do meet that it is only temporary.'

'I'm not likely to meet anybody,' said the constable. 'I've been standing here hardly daring to move since it came.'

'What time did it happen?'

'About ten o'clock, as near as I can remember,' said the policeman. 'How far from here is Downing Street?'

The constable hesitated.

'I don't know where we are,' he said, 'but it can't be very far.'

Two hours' diligent search, two hours of groping and of stumbling, two hours of discussing with frantic men and women whom he met on the way, brought him to Downing Street.

That journey along Whitehall would remain in his mind a horrible memory for all his days. He heard oaths and sobbings. He heard the wild jabberings of somebody— whether it was man or woman he could not say— who had gone mad under the stress of the calamity, and he came to Downing Street as the clock struck three.

He might have passed the Prime Minister's house but he heard voices and recognized one as that of Sexton.

The great man was moaning his trouble to somebody who spoke in a quiet unemotional voice. 'Halloa, Sexton!'

Bevan stumbled toward, and collided with the great physician. 'Who is it?' said Sexton.

'It is Hereford Bevan.'

'It's the man, Prime Minister, the doctor I spoke to you about.' A cool hand took Bevan's.

'Come this way,' said the voice; 'you had better stay, Sexton, you'll never find your way back.'

Bevan found himself led through what he judged to be a large hall and then suddenly his feet struck a heavy carpet.

'I think there's a chair behind you,' said the new voice, 'sit down and tell me all about it.' Dr Bevan spoke for ten minutes, his host merely interjecting a question here and there.

'It can only last for five days,' said the voice, with a quiver of emotion, 'and we can only last out that five days. You know, of course, that the food supply has stopped. There is no way of averting this terrible tragedy. Can you make a suggestion?'

'Yes, sir,' said Bevan. 'There are a number of blind institutes throughout the country. Get in touch with them and let their trained men organize the business of industry. I think it could be done.'

There was a pause.

'It might be done,' said the voice. 'Happily the telegraphs are working satisfactorily, as messages can be taken by sound. The wireless is also working and your suggestion shall be carried out.'

The days that followed were days of nightmare, days when men groped and stumbled in an unknown world, shrieking for food. On the evening of the second day the water supply failed. The pumping stations had ceased to work. Happily it rained and people were able to collect water in their mackintosh coats.

Dr Bevan made several excursions a day and in one of these he met another bold adventurer who told him that part of the Strand was on fire. Somebody had upset a lamp without noticing the fact. The doctor made his way toward the Strand but was forced to turn back by the clouds of pungent smoke which met him.

He and his informant (he was a butcher from Smithfield) locked arms and made their way back to the Institute. By some mischance they took a wrong turning and might have been irretrievably lost but they found a guardian angel in the shape of a woman against whom they blundered.

'The Jackson Institute?' she said. 'Oh yes, I can lead you there.'

She walked with unfaltering footsteps and with such decision that the doctor thought she had been spared the supreme affliction. He asked her this and she laughed.

'Oh, no,' she said, cheerfully. 'You see, I've been blind all my life. The Government has put us on point duty at various places to help people who have lost their way.'

She told them that, according to her information, big fires were raging in half-a-dozen parts of London. She had heard of no railway collisions and the Prime Minister told her—

'Told you?' said Bevan in surprise, and again she laughed. 'I've met him before, you see,' she said. 'I am Lord Selbury's daughter, Lillian Selbury.' Bevan remembered the name. It is curious that he had pictured her, for all the beauty of her voice, as a sad, middle-aged woman. She took his hand in hers and they walked slowly toward his house.

'You'll think I'm horrid if I say I am enjoying this,' she said, 'and yet I am. It's so lovely to be able to pity others! Of course, it is very dreadful and it is beginning to

frighten me a little, and then there's nobody to tell me how pretty I am, because nobody can see. That is rather a drawback, isn't it?' and she laughed again.

'What does the Government think about this?'

'They are terribly upset,' she said, in a graver tone; 'you see, they cannot get at the people— they are so used to depending on the newspapers, but there are no newspapers now, and if there were nobody could read them. They have just stopped— You step down from the kerb here and walk twenty-five paces and step up again. We are crossing Whitehall Gardens. They have wonderful faith in this Dr Bevan.'

Hereford Bevan felt himself going red.

'I hope their faith is justified,' he said, grimly; 'I happen to be the wonderful doctor.' He felt her fingers grip him in an uncontrollable spasm of surprise.

'Are you really?' she said, with a new note of interest. 'Listen!'

They stopped, and he heard the tinkle of a bell.

'That is one of our people from St Mildreds,' she said; 'the Government is initiating a system of town-criers. It is the only way we can get news to the people.'

Bevan listened and heard the sing-song voice of the crier but could not distinguish what he said. The girl led him to his house and there left him. He felt her hand running down his right arm and wondered why until she took his hand and shook it.

Old Professor Van der Bergh roared a greeting as he came into the room.

'Is that you, Bevan?' he asked. 'I've got a knuckle of cold ham here, but be careful how you cut it, otherwise you're going to slice your fingers.'

He and Stuart Gold had spent the day feeding the various specimens in the laboratory. The fourth day dawned and in the afternoon came a knock at the door. It was the girl.

'I've been ordered to place myself at your disposal, Dr Bevan,' she said; 'the Government may need you.'

He spent that day wandering through the deserted streets with the girl at his side and as the hundred and twentieth hour approached he found himself looking forward not so much to the end of the tragic experience which he shared with the world, but to seeing with his own eyes the face of this guide of his. He had slept the clock round and just before ten struck he made his way to the street. He heard Big Ben boom the hour and waited for light, but no light came. Another hour passed and yet another, and his soul was seized with blind panic. Suppose sight never returned, suppose his experiments were altogether wrong and that what happened in the case of the rabbits did not happen to Man! Suppose the blindness was permanent! He groaned at the thought.

The girl was with him, her arm in his, throughout that day. His nerves were breaking, and somehow she sensed this fact and comforted him as a mother might

comfort a child. She led him into the park with sure footsteps and walked him up and down, trying to distract his mind from the horror with which it was oppressed.

In the afternoon he was sent for to the Cabinet Council and again told the story of his experiments.

'The hundred and twenty hours are passed, are they not, doctor?' said the Premier's voice.

'Yes, sir,' replied Bevan in a low voice, 'but it is humanly impossible to be sure that that is the exact time.'

No other question was asked him but the terror of his audience came back to him like an aura and shrivelled his very heart.

He did not lie down as was his wont that night, but wandered out alone into the streets of London. It must have been two o'clock in the morning when he came back to find the girl standing on the step talking with Van der Bergh.

She came toward him at the sound of his voice.

'There is another Cabinet meeting, doctor,' she said, 'will you come with me?'

'I hope I haven't kept you long,' he said, brokenly. His voice was husky and so unlike his own that she was startled.

'You're not to take this to heart, Dr Bevan,' she said, severely, as they began their pilgrimage to Whitehall. 'There's a terrible task waiting for the world which has to be faced.'

'Wait, wait!' he said, hoarsely, and gripped the rail with one hand and her arm with the other. Was it imagination? It was still dark, a fine drizzle of rain was falling, but the blackness was dappled with tones of less blackness. There was a dark, straight thing before him, something that seemed to hang in the centre of his eye, and a purple shape beyond, and he knew that he was looking at a London street, at a London lamp-post, with eyes that saw. Black London, London devoid of light, London whose streets were packed with motionless vehicles that stood just where they had stopped on the day the darkness fell, London with groping figures half mad with joy, shrieking and sobbing their relief— he drew a long breath.

'What is it? What is it?' said the girl in a frightened voice.

'I can see! I can see!' said Bevan in a whisper.

'Can you?' she said, wistfully. 'I— I am so glad. And now—'

He was near to tears and his arms went about her. He fumbled in his pocket for a match and struck a light. That blessed light he saw, and saw, too, the pale spiritual face turned up to his.

'I can see you,' he whispered again. 'My God! You're the most beautiful thing I have ever seen!'

London slept from sheer force of habit and woke with the grey dawn to see—to look out upon a world that had been lost for five and a half days, but in the night all the forces of the law and the Crown had been working at feverish pace, railways had dragged their drivers from their beds, carriers and stokers had been

collected by the police, and slowly the wheels of life were turning again, and a humble world, grateful for the restoration of its greatest gift, hungered in patience and was happy.

3: Review

***Raise the Titanic!*, 1976 (Clive Cussler)**

Terry Walker, 1944-

In: *A Century of Sensational Fiction*, 2013

Placed in the public domain in 2013 by the author.

AS P. G. WODEHOUSE once observed, there's nothing an author has to guard himself against more carefully than the saga habit.

"The least slackening of vigilance and the thing has gripped him," Wodehouse wrote in the 1930s. "He writes a story. Another story with the same characters occurs to him, and he writes that. He feels that just one more won't hurt him, and he writes a third. And before he knows where he is, he is down with a Saga, and no cure in sight."

Struggling authors might easily fail to see the problem. They'd love a successful saga. But there are many traps. The most lethal is the Improbability Barrier.

The Improbability Barrier

FEW HEROES have hit the Improbability Barrier harder than Clive Cussler's noble, square-jawed, two-fisted underwater super-hero Dirk Pitt. He has discovered Abraham Lincoln's mummified corpse in the Sahara desert while saving us from The End of Civilisation As We Know It; located the entire contents of the ancient Library of Alexandria in perfect condition in a cave in Texas; raised the *Titanic* in one piece (no mean effort, given that it sank in two pieces); discovered the Treasure of El Dorado in a cave in Baja California; and saved Washington D.C. from being bombarded with virulent bacteria— these being representative samples of his mighty (and improbable) deeds.

In the course of a score of best-selling adventures he has been shot so many times he is practically solid lead, been beaten up so many times his skull looks like a crushed ball of aluminium foil, and lost enough blood to transfuse an entire city,

He has escaped from a Cuban prison in an outboard-powered bathtub (I wonder where he found the bath plug?), and, in a plot twist straight out of Fleming's *Dr No*, saved a NASA space shuttle from capture by the bad guys, by disabling their jamming radio signal. He has driven a vintage car down a steep ski-run while being chased by machine-gun shooting villains and survived, been shot out of the sky into the ocean while flying a vintage blimp in a hurricane and survived, been washed through hundreds of kilometres of fast-rushing underground river and survived—

Any one of Dirk Pitt's adventures is wildly improbable in its own right. The odds of one man having dozens of these wildly improbable adventures is conservatively estimated (by me) to be at least a gazillion to one against. After a while, the reader begins to snigger, and when the intrepid hero hits the Improbability Barrier at Warp 7, the willing suspension of disbelief dies with him.

Nevertheless, I greatly enjoy each new entry in the Dirk Pitt saga, and have done so ever since I first picked up a copy of *Raise the Titanic!* some years ago. This book was a very early entry in the never-ending story, coming after *Mayday!*, *Iceberg* and *Vixen 03*. My present copy is a 1980 Sphere paperback, which I bought second hand for \$3.50 from Mr Thrifty's paperback exchange in Canberra in the late '80s. *Raise the Titanic!*, now that I re-read it for the first time in more than a decade, is not unlike a Bulldog Drummond adventure. There is the intrepid, noble, square-jawed hero, the evil villains, the McGuffin, the inevitable last-minute rescue of the glamorous heroine from A Fate Worse Than Death, and the equally inevitable climactic face-to-face encounter of good guy and bad guy.

The McGuffin

IN THIS NOVEL the McGuffin is a quantity of a rare radioactive element byzanium (so rare that it is unknown to science; perhaps Cussler ought to have called it unobtanium) which is indispensable to a new US anti-missile defence system. Geologists advise that the only known source is on the Russian island of Novaya Zemlya, in the Barents Sea. A U.S. secret agent who is a geologist surreptitiously investigates the location, and discovers that the whole lot was dug up way back in 1912 by a bunch of miners from Colorado, no less.

It transpires that back in 1912 the miners, who had been clandestinely recruited by the French (who no doubt wanted it for their Edwardian anti-Zeppelin defence system) got the stuff away from Novaya Zemlya and then decided to shake down the French Government for a lot more money. The French government, *naturellement*, couldn't see why it should pay a single additional *sou*, and set out to exterminate the miners and steal the stuff back. Hotly pursued by the French secret service, those nice people who later brought you the *Rainbow Warrior* tragedy, the miners flee across Europe to England. Alas, the team suffer heavy attrition at the hands of the French, and are rapidly reduced to but one man, who took ship to New York on the *Titanic* with his trophy.

NUMA

WHICH BRINGS US to Dirk Pitt and NUMA. NUMA (The National Underwater and Marine Agency) is a sort of soggy edition of NASA, dedicated to boldly going where no frogman has gone before. It is run by a tetchy former admiral named

Sandecker, whose star employee is the said Mr Dirk Pitt. (And *Dirk Pitt* is in actually a registered trade mark!) The era of the free-lance adventurer of independent means is long gone; in these later more regimented days a hero has to have a "franchise". Just as James Bond is licensed to kill by the British Government, Dirk Pitt is licensed to adventure by NUMA.

Having deduced that the all-important byzantium is locked in a vault in the bowels of the *Titanic*, the President of the United States secretly commissions NUMA to raise the ship so that the stuff can be recovered. There's a lot of double-talk about why it's necessary to raise the ship, rather than simply crack open the vault *in situ*, but I didn't believe a word of it. Clive Cussler, an undersea salvage buff, wanted to write a story about raising the *Titanic*, and this is it.

In this operation, Pitt is aided and abetted by his trusty sidekick Al Giordino and by a new recruit in the hourglass shape of Dana Seagram, archaeologist. In the ironclad tradition of Cussler novels, Ms Seagram, age 31, is not just some dim bimbo for Pitt to rescue on page 256, and boink on page 285. She is a Ph.D., already at the top of her profession, and she is also a stupefyingly beautiful cupcake. Her ostensible role is to supervise the archaeological aspects of the salvage operation; her actual role is to be naked on page 253, to be rescued on page 256, and to be boinked by Dirk Pitt on page 285. Quite different, really.

Spy vs Spy

MERELY TELLING the tale of the awe-inspiring salvage of the *Titanic* is not enough for Mr Cussler; lots of spy-vs-spy sub-plots and counterplots, which seem to have fallen out of an unpublished Le Carre novel, are introduced. The Russkies have woken up to what's going on; there are US spies in the Kremlin and Russki spies in NUMA. Before you can say "George Smiley" there are Russian ships circling the small US salvage fleet poised above the *Titanic*. Furthermore, Hurricane Amanda, who was kicking up her heels near Bermuda during most of the expedition, is on her way north to join in the fun.

At around page 200, Cussler begins to pull all the narrative strands together. Sabotage strikes the salvage attempt, but is overcome at the last desperate minute; the *Titanic* bobs to the surface in one piece and wallows in the heaving sea; and the Russkies and Hurricane Amanda swoop in for the kill.

When the spume, seaweed and cordite settles, the Russkies are on board the *Titanic* in a Mexican standoff with Sandecker's men, and Dirk Pitt is presumed dead in a fiery helicopter crash. Showing his true colours as a double-dyed villain, the chief of the Russki hijacking operation grabs the glamorous Dana Seagram, forces her to strip naked in front of his leering troops and Sandecker's appalled men, and threatens to have her either gang raped or cut into small pieces,

whichever it takes to force Sandecker to hand over the deeds to the ranch, or rather the byzanium.

This is naturally the cue for Pitt to rise from the dead and "smite the Midianites". Dana Seagram is rescued at the last second, the bad guys are soon dead or in handcuffs, and it's time for port and cigars as the seaweed-covered Ghost of the Grand Banks is towed toward New York. It's also time for Pitt and Ms Seagram to slip into one of the *Titanic*'s staterooms for a bit of horizontal folk-dancing; a modern super-hero has his inevitable rewards. Frankly, though, I couldn't help thinking that the linen and blankets, after sixty years at the bottom of the sea, might have been a touch soggy.

But there is one last complication. When the ship's strongroom is opened, there proves to be no byzanium on board the *Titanic* after all. The last survivor had stashed it somewhere in England and left a very hazy clue in his dairy.

Pitt, with deductive skills worthy of Sherlock Holmes, solves this little problem too, and as the precious unobtanium is dug up from a grave yard in the UK he recedes nobly (and modestly) into a shroud of mist, rather like the hero in an old-time Western radio serial: "*Mah work heah is done, Miz Seagram; Ah must rahd on!*"

It is a preposterous novel, of course; many adventure stories of this type are inherently preposterous. But the pace is brisk enough, the rather pedestrian prose is serviceable enough, and Cussler's paper-thin characters are just real enough, to keep you turning the pages to the very end. It's also good enough to encourage you to buy the next startling volume in the saga; perhaps not brand-new in hardback, but when it finally fronts up in paperback in a second-hand book store for, let's say, \$3.50.

4: A Lodging For The Night

Robert Louis Stevenson

1850-1894

Temple Bar, Oct 1877

IT WAS LATE IN NOVEMBER 1456. The snow fell over Paris with rigorous, relentless persistence; sometimes the wind made a sally and scattered it in flying vortices; sometimes there was a lull, and flake after flake descended out of the black night air, silent, circuitous, interminable. To poor people, looking up under moist eyebrows, it seemed a wonder where it all came from. Master Francis Villon had propounded an alternative that afternoon, at a tavern window: was it only Pagan Jupiter plucking geese upon Olympus, or were the holy angels moulting? He was only a poor Master of Arts, he went on; and as the question somewhat touched upon divinity, he durst not venture to conclude. A silly old priest from Montargis, who was among the company, treated the young rascal to a bottle of wine in honor of the jest and the grimaces with which it was accompanied, and swore on his own white beard that he had been just such another irreverent dog when he was Villon's age.

The air was raw and pointed, but not far below freezing; and the flakes were large, damp, and adhesive. The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a footfall given the alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the black ground of the river. High up overhead the snow settled among the tracery of the cathedral towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head. The gargoyles had been transformed into great false noses, drooping toward the point. The crockets were like upright pillows swollen on one side. In the intervals of the wind there was a dull sound of dripping about the precincts of the church.

The cemetery of St. John had taken its own share of the snow. All the graves were decently covered; tall, white housetops stood around in grave array; worthy burghers were long ago in bed, benightcapped like their domiciles; there was no light in all the neighborhood but a little peep from a lamp that hung swinging in the church choir, and tossed the shadows to and fro in time to its oscillations. The clock was hard on ten when the patrol went by with halberds and a lantern, beating their hands; and they saw nothing suspicious about the cemetery of St. John.

Yet there was a small house, backed up against the cemetery wall, which was still awake, and awake to evil purpose, in that snoring district. There was not much to betray it from without; only a stream of warm vapor from the chimney-top, a patch where the snow melted on the roof, and a few half-obliterated footprints at

the door. But within, behind the shuttered windows, Master Francis Villon, the poet, and some of the thievish crew with whom he consorted, were keeping the night alive and passing round the bottle.

A great pile of living embers diffused a strong and ruddy glow from the arched chimney. Before this straddled Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk, with his skirts picked up and his fat legs bared to the comfortable warmth. His dilated shadow cut the room in half; and the firelight only escaped on either side of his broad person, and in a little pool between his outspread feet. His face had the beery, bruised appearance of the continual drinker's; it was covered with a network of congested veins, purple in ordinary circumstances, but now pale violet, for even with his back to the fire the cold pinched him on the other side. His cowl had half fallen back, and made a strange excrescence on either side of his bull neck. So he straddled, grumbling, and cut the room in half with the shadow of his portly frame.

On the right, Villon and Guy Tabary were huddled together over a scrap of parchment; Villon making a ballade which he was to call the *Ballade of Roast Fish*, and Tabary spluttering admiration at his shoulder. The poet was a rag of a man, dark, little, and lean, with hollow cheeks and thin black locks. He carried his four-and-twenty years with feverish animation. Greed had made folds about his eyes, evil smiles had puckered his mouth. The wolf and pig struggled together in his face. It was an eloquent, sharp, ugly, earthly countenance. His hands were small and prehensile, with fingers knotted like a cord; and they were continually flickering in front of him in violent and expressive pantomime. As for Tabary, a broad, complacent, admiring imbecility breathed from his squash nose and slobbering lips: he had become a thief, just as he might have become the most decent of burgesses, by the imperious chance that rules the lives of human geese and human donkeys.

At the monk's other hand, Montigny and Thevenin Pensete played a game of chance. About the first there clung some flavor of good birth and training, as about a fallen angel; something long, lithe, and courtly in the person; something aquiline and darkling in the face. Thevenin, poor soul, was in great feather: he had done a good stroke of knavery that afternoon in the Faubourg St. Jacques, and all night he had been gaining from Montigny. A flat smile illuminated his face; his bald head shone rosily in a garland of red curls; his little protuberant stomach shook with silent chucklings as he swept in his gains.

"Doubles or quits?" said Thevenin.

Montigny nodded grimly.

"*Some may prefer to dine in state*" wrote Villon, "*On bread and cheese on silver plate*. Or— or— help me out, Guido!"

Tabary giggled.

"*Or parsley on a silver dish*" scribbled the poet.

The wind was freshening without; it drove the snow before it, and sometimes raised its voice in a victorious whoop, and made sepulchral grumblings in the chimney. The cold was growing sharper as the night went on. Villon, protruding his lips, imitated the gust with something between a whistle and a groan. It was an eerie, uncomfortable talent of the poet's, much detested by the Picardy monk.

"Can't you hear it rattle in the gibbet?" said Villon. "They are all dancing the devil's jig on nothing, up there. You may dance, my gallants, you'll be none the warmer! Whew, what a gust! Down went somebody just now! A medlar the fewer on the three-legged medlar-tree!— I say, Dom Nicolas, it'll be cold to-night on the St. Denis Road?" he asked.

Dom Nicolas winked both his big eyes, and seemed to choke upon his Adam's apple. Montfaucon, the great grisly Paris gibbet, stood hard by the St. Denis Road, and the pleasantry touched him on the raw. As for Tabary, he laughed immoderately over the medlars; he had never heard anything more light-hearted; and he held his sides and crowed. Villon fetched him a fillip on the nose, which turned his mirth into an attack of coughing.

"Oh, stop that row," said Villon, "and think of rhymes to 'fish.'"

"Doubles or quits," said Montigny doggedly.

"With all my heart," quoth Thevenin.

"Is there any more in that bottle?" asked the monk.

"Open another," said Villon. "How do you ever hope to fill that big hogshead, your body, with little things like bottles? And how do you expect to get to heaven? How many angels, do you fancy, can be spared to carry up a single monk from Picardy? Or do you think yourself another Elias—and they'll send the coach for you?"

"*Hominibus impossibile*" replied the monk, as he filled his glass.

Tabary was in ecstasies.

Villon filliped his nose again.

"Laugh at my jokes, if you like," he said.

"It was very good," objected Tabary.

Villon made a face at him. "Think of rhymes to 'fish,'" he said. "What have you to do with Latin? You'll wish you knew none of it at the great assizes, when the devil calls for Guido Tabary, clericus— the devil with the humpback and red-hot finger-nails. Talking of the devil," he added, in a whisper, "look at Montigny!"

All three peered covertly at the gamester. He did not seem to be enjoying his luck. His mouth was a little to a side; one nostril nearly shut, and the other much inflated. The black dog was on his back, as people say, in terrifying nursery metaphor; and he breathed hard under the gruesome burden.

"He looks as if he could knife him," whispered Tabary, with round eyes.

The monk shuddered, and turned his face and spread his open hands to the red embers. It was the cold that thus affected Dom Nicolas, and not any excess of moral sensibility.

"Come now," said Villon— "about this ballade. How does it run so far?" And beating time with his hand, he read it aloud to Tabary.

They were interrupted at the fourth rhyme by a brief and fatal movement among the gamesters. The round was completed, and Thevenin was just opening his mouth to claim another victory, when Montigny leaped up, swift as an adder, and stabbed him to the heart. The blow took effect before he had time to utter a cry, before he had time to move. A tremor or two convulsed his frame; his hands opened and shut, his heels rattled on the floor; then his head rolled backward over one shoulder with the eyes open, and Thevenin Pensete's spirit had returned to Him who made it.

Everyone sprang to his feet; but the business was over in two twos. The four living fellows looked at each other in rather a ghastly fashion; the dead man contemplating a corner of the roof with a singular and ugly leer.

"My God!" said Tabary, and he began to pray in Latin.

Villon broke out into hysterical laughter. He came a step forward and clucked a ridiculous bow at Thevenin, and laughed still louder. Then he sat down suddenly, all of a heap, upon a stool, and continued laughing bitterly as though he would shake himself to pieces.

Montigny recovered his composure first.

"Let's see what he has about him," he remarked; and he picked the dead man's pockets with a practised hand, and divided the money into four equal portions on the table. "There's for you," he said.

The monk received his share with a deep sigh, and a single stealthy glance at the dead Thevenin, who was beginning to sink into himself and topple sideways off the chair.

"We're all in for it," cried Villon, swallowing his mirth. "It's a hanging job for every man jack of us that's here— not to speak of those who aren't." He made a shocking gesture in the air with his raised right hand, and put out his tongue and threw his head on one side, so as to counterfeit the appearance of one who has been hanged. Then he pocketed his share of the spoil, and executed a shuffle with his feet as if to restore the circulation.

Tabary was the last to help himself; he made a dash at the money, and retired to the other end of the apartment.

Montigny stuck Thevenin upright in the chair, and drew out the dagger, which was followed by a jet of blood.

"You fellows had better be moving," he said, as he wiped the blade on his victim's doublet.

"I think we had," returned Villon with a gulp. "Damn his fat head!" he broke out. "It sticks in my throat like phlegm. What right has a man to have red hair when he is dead?" And he fell all of a heap again upon the stool, and fairly covered his face with his hands.

Montigny and Dom Nicolas laughed aloud, even Tabary feebly chiming in.

"Cry baby," said the monk.

"I always said he was a woman," added Montigny with a sneer. "Sit up, can't you?" he went on, giving another shake to the murdered body. "Tread out that fire, Nick." But Nick was better employed; he was quietly taking Villon's purse, as the poet sat, limp and trembling, on the stool where he had been making a ballade not three minutes before. Montigny and Tabary dumbly demanded a share of the booty, which the monk silently promised as he passed the little bag into the bosom of his gown. In many ways an artistic nature unfits a man for practical existence.

No sooner had the theft been accomplished than Villon shook himself, jumped to his feet, and began helping to scatter and extinguish the embers. Meanwhile Montigny opened the door and cautiously peered into the street. The coast was clear; there was no meddlesome patrol in sight. Still it was judged wiser to slip out severally; and as Villon was himself in a hurry to escape from the neighborhood of the dead Thevenin, and the rest were in a still greater hurry to get rid of him before he should discover the loss of his money, he was the first by general consent to issue forth into the street.

The wind had triumphed and swept all the clouds from heaven. Only a few vapors, as thin as moonlight, fleeted rapidly across the stars. It was bitter cold; and by a common optical effect, things seemed almost more definite than in the broadest daylight. The sleeping city was absolutely still: a company of white hoods, a field full of little Alps, below the twinkling stars. Villon cursed his fortune. Would it were still snowing! Now, wherever he went he left an indelible trail behind him on the glittering streets; wherever he went he was still tethered to the house by the cemetery of St. John; wherever he went he must weave, with his own plodding feet, the rope that bound him to the crime and would bind him to the gallows. The leer of the dead man came back to him with a new significance. He snapped his fingers as if to pluck up his own spirits, and choosing a street at random, stepped boldly forward in the snow.

Two things preoccupied him as he went: the aspect of the gallows at Montfaucon in this bright windy phase of the night's existence, for one; and for another, the look of the dead man with his bald head and garland of red curls. Both struck cold upon his heart, and he kept quickening his pace as if he could escape from unpleasant thoughts by mere fleetness of foot. Sometimes he looked back over his shoulder with a sudden nervous jerk; but he was the only moving

thing in the white streets, except when the wind swooped round a corner and threw up the snow, which was beginning to freeze, in spouts of glittering dust.

Suddenly he saw, a long way before him, a black clump and a couple of lanterns. The clump was in motion, and the lanterns swung as though carried by men walking. It was a patrol. And though it was merely crossing his line of march, he judged it wiser to get out of eyeshot as speedily as he could. He was not in the humor to be challenged, and he was conscious of making a very conspicuous mark upon the snow. Just on his left hand there stood a great hotel, with some turrets and a large porch before the door; it was half-ruinous, he remembered, and had long stood empty; and so he made three steps of it and jumped inside the shelter of the porch. It was pretty dark inside, after the glimmer of the snowy streets, and he was groping forward with outspread hands, when he stumbled over some substance which offered an indescribable mixture of resistances, hard and soft, firm and loose. His heart gave a leap, and he sprang two steps back and stared dreadfully at the obstacle. Then he gave a little laugh of relief. It was only a woman, and she dead. He knelt beside her to make sure upon this latter point. She was freezing cold, and rigid like a stick. A little ragged finery fluttered in the wind about her hair, and her cheeks had been heavily rouged that same afternoon. Her pockets were quite empty; but in her stocking, underneath the garter, Villon found two of the small coins that went by the name of whites. It was little enough; but it was always something; and the poet was moved with a deep sense of pathos that she should have died before she had spent her money. That seemed to him a dark and pitiable mystery; and he looked from the coins in his hand to the dead woman, and back again to the coins, shaking his head over the riddle of man's life. Henry V. of England, dying at Vincennes just after he had conquered France, and this poor jade cut off by a cold draught in a great man's doorway, before she had time to spend her couple of whites— it seemed a cruel way to carry on the world. Two whites would have taken such a little while to squander; and yet it would have been one more good taste in the mouth, one more smack of the lips, before the devil got the soul, and the body was left to birds and vermin. He would like to use all his tallow before the light was blown out and the lantern broken.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was feeling, half-mechanically, for his purse. Suddenly his heart stopped beating; a feeling of cold scales passed up the back of his legs, and a cold blow seemed to fall upon his scalp. He stood petrified for a moment; then he felt again with one feverish movement; and then his loss burst upon him, and he was covered with perspiration. To spend thrifts money is so living and actual— it is such a thin veil between them and their pleasures! There is only one limit to their fortune— that of time; and a spendthrift with only a few crowns is the Emperor of Rome until they are spent. For such a person to lose his money is to suffer the most shocking

reverse, and fall from heaven to hell, from all to nothing, in a breath. And all the more if he has put his head in the halter for it; if he may be hanged to-morrow for that same purse, so dearly earned, so foolishly departed. Villon stood and cursed; he threw the two whites into the street; he shook his fist at heaven; he stamped, and was not horrified to find himself trampling the poor corpse. Then he began rapidly to retrace his steps toward the house beside the cemetery. He had forgotten all fear of the patrol, which was long gone by at any rate, and had no idea but that of his lost purse. It was in vain that he looked right and left upon the snow; nothing was to be seen. He had not dropped it in the streets. Had it fallen in the house? He would have liked dearly to go in and see; but the idea of the grisly occupant unmanned him. And he saw besides, as he drew near, that their efforts to put out the fire had been unsuccessful; on the contrary, it had broken into a blaze, and a changeful light played in the chinks of the door and window, and revived his terror for the authorities and Paris gibbet.

He returned to the hotel with the porch, and groped about upon the snow for the money he had thrown away in his childish passion. But he could only find one white; the other had probably struck sideways and sunk deeply in. With a single white in his pocket, all his projects for a rousing night in some wild tavern vanished utterly away. And it was not only pleasure that fled laughing from his grasp; positive discomfort, positive pain, attacked him as he stood ruefully before the porch. His perspiration had dried upon him; and though the wind had now fallen, a binding frost was setting in stronger with every hour, and he felt benumbed and sick at heart. What was to be done? Late as was the hour, improbable as was success, he would try the house of his adopted father, the chaplain of St. Benoit.

He ran there all the way, and knocked timidly. There was no answer. He knocked again and again, taking heart with every stroke; and at last steps were heard approaching from within. A barred wicket fell open in the iron-studded door, and emitted a gush of yellow light.

"Hold up your face to the wicket," said the chaplain from within.

"It's only me," whimpered Villon.

"Oh, it's only you, is it?" returned the chaplain; and he cursed him with foul unpriestly oaths for disturbing him at such an hour, and bade him be off to hell, where he came from.

"My hands are blue to the wrists," pleaded Villon; "my feet are dead and full of twinges; my nose aches with the sharp air; the cold lies at my heart. I may be dead before morning. Only this once, father, and before God I will never ask again."

"You should have come earlier," said the ecclesiastic, coolly. "Young men require a lesson now and then." He shut the wicket and retired deliberately into the interior of the house.

Villon was beside himself; he beat upon the door with his hands and feet, and shouted hoarsely after the chaplain.

"Wormy old fox," he cried. "If I had my hand under your twist, I would send you flying headlong into the bottomless pit."

A door shut in the interior, faintly audible to the poet down long passages. He passed his hand over his mouth with an oath. And then the humor of the situation struck him, and he laughed and looked lightly up to heaven, where the stars seemed to be winking over his discomfiture.

What was to be done? It looked very like a night in the frosty streets. The idea of the dead woman popped into his imagination, and gave him a hearty fright; what had happened to her in the early night might very well happen to him before morning. And he so young! and with such immense possibilities of disorderly amusement before him! He felt quite pathetic over the notion of his own fate, as if it had been some one else's, and made a little imaginative vignette of the scene in the morning when they should find his body.

He passed all his chances under review, turning the white between his thumb and forefinger. Unfortunately he was on bad terms with some old friends who would once have taken pity on him in such a plight. He had lampooned them in verses, he had beaten and cheated them; and yet now, when he was in so close a pinch, he thought there was at least one who might perhaps relent. It was a chance. It was worth trying at least, and he would go and see.

On the way, two little accidents happened to him which colored his musings in a very different manner. For, first, he fell in with the track of a patrol, and walked in it for some yards, although it lay out of his direction. And this spirited him up; at least he had confused his trail; for he was still possessed with the idea of people tracking him all about Paris over the snow, and collaring him next morning before he was awake. The other matter affected him very differently. He passed a street corner, where, not so long before, a woman and her child had been devoured by wolves. This was just the kind of weather, he reflected, when wolves might take it into their heads to enter Paris again; and a lone man in these deserted streets would run the chance of something worse than a mere scare. He stopped and looked upon the place with unpleasant interest— it was a centre where several lanes intersected each other; and he looked down them all one after another, and held his breath to listen, lest he should detect some galloping black things on the snow or hear the sound of howling between him and the river. He remembered his mother telling him the story and pointing out the spot, while he was yet a child. His mother! If he only knew where she lived, he might make sure at least of shelter. He determined he would inquire upon the morrow: nay, he would go and see her, too, poor old girl! So thinking, he arrived at his destination— his last hope for the night.

The house was quite dark, like its neighbors, and yet after a few taps, he heard a movement overhead, a door opening, and a cautious voice asking who was there. The poet named himself in a loud whisper, and waited, not without some trepidation, the result. Nor had he to wait long. A window was suddenly opened, and a pailful of slops splashed down upon the doorstep. Villon had not been unprepared for something of the sort, and had put himself as much in shelter as the nature of the porch admitted; but for all that, he was deplorably drenched below the waist. His hose began to freeze almost at once. Death from cold and exposure stared him in the face; he remembered he was of phthisical tendency, and began coughing tentatively. But the gravity of the danger steadied his nerves. He stopped a few hundred yards from the door where he had been so rudely used, and reflected with his finger to his nose. He could only see one way of getting a lodging, and that was to take it. He had noticed a house not far away which looked as if it might be easily broken into, and thither he betook himself promptly, entertaining himself on the way with the idea of a room still hot, with a table still loaded with the remains of supper, where he might pass the rest of the black hours, and whence he should issue, on the morrow, with an armful of valuable plate. He even considered on what viands and what wines he should prefer; and as he was calling the roll of his favorite dainties, roast fish presented itself to his mind with an odd mixture of amusement and horror.

"I shall never finish that ballade," he thought to himself; and then, with another shudder at the recollection, "Oh, damn his fat head!" he repeated fervently, and spat upon the snow.

The house in question looked dark at first sight; but as Villon made a preliminary inspection in search of the handiest point of attack, a little twinkle of light caught his eye from behind a curtained window.

"The devil!" he thought. "People awake! Some student or some saint, confound the crew! Can't they get drunk and lie in bed snoring like their neighbors! What's the good of curfew, and poor devils of bell-ringers jumping at a rope's-end in bell-towers? What's the use of day, if people sit up all night? The gripes to them!" He grinned as he saw where his logic was leading him. "Every man to his business, after all," added he, "and if they're awake, by the Lord, I may come by a supper honestly for this once, and cheat the devil."

He went boldly to the door, and knocked with an assured hand. On both previous occasions he had knocked timidly and with some dread of attracting notice; but now, when he had just discarded the thought of a burglarious entry, knocking at a door seemed a mighty simple and innocent proceeding. The sound of his blows echoed through the house with thin, phantasmal reverberations, as though it were quite empty; but these had scarcely died away before a measured tread drew near, a couple of bolts were withdrawn, and one wing was opened broadly, as though no guile or fear of guile were known to those within. A tall

figure of a man, muscular and spare, but a little bent, confronted Villon. The head was massive in bulk, but finely sculptured; the nose blunt at the bottom but refining upward to where it joined a pair of strong and honest eyebrows; the mouth and eyes surrounded with delicate markings, and the whole face based upon a thick white beard, boldly and squarely trimmed. Seen as it was by the light of a flickering hand-lamp, it looked perhaps nobler than it had a right to do; but it was a fine face, honorable rather than intelligent, strong, simple, and righteous.

"You knock late, sir," said the old man in resonant, courteous tones.

Villon cringed, and brought up many servile words of apology; at a crisis of this sort, the beggar was uppermost in him, and the man of genius hid his head with confusion.

"You are cold," repeated the old man, "and hungry? Well, step in." And he ordered him into the house with a noble enough gesture.

"Some great seigneur," thought Villon, as his host, setting down the lamp on the flagged pavement of the entry, shot the bolts once more into their places.

"You will pardon me if I go in front," he said, when this was done; and he preceded the poet up-stairs into a large apartment, warmed with a pan of charcoal and lit by a great lamp hanging from the roof. It was very bare of furniture; only some gold plate on a sideboard; some folios; and a stand of armor between the windows. Some smart tapestry hung upon the walls, representing the crucifixion of our Lord in one piece, and in another a scene of shepherds and shepherdesses by a running stream. Over the chimney was a shield of arms.

"Will you seat yourself," said the old man, "and forgive me if I leave you? I am alone in my house to-night, and if you are to eat I must forage for you myself."

No sooner was his host gone than Villon leaped from the chair on which he just seated himself, and began examining the room, with the stealth and passion of a cat. He weighed the gold flagons in his hand, opened all the folios, and investigated the arms upon the shield, and the stuff with which the seats were lined. He raised the window-curtains, and saw that the windows were set with rich stained glass in figures, so far as he could see, of martial import. Then he stood in the middle of the room, drew a long breath, and retaining it with puffed cheeks, looked round and round him, turning on his heels, as if to impress every feature of the apartment on his memory.

"Seven pieces of plate," he said. "If there had been ten I would have risked it. A fine house, and a fine old master, so help me all the saints."

And just then, hearing the old man's tread returning along the corridor, he stole back to his chair, and began toasting his wet legs before the charcoal pan.

His entertainer had a plate of meat in one hand and a jug of wine in the other. He set down the plate upon the table, motioning Villon to draw in his chair, and going to the sideboard, brought back two goblets, which he filled.

"I drink to your better fortune," he said, gravely touching Villon's cup with his own.

"To our better acquaintance," said the poet, growing bold. A mere man of the people would have been awed by the courtesy of the old seigneur, but Villon was hardened in that matter; he had made mirth for great lords before now, and found them as black rascals as himself. And so he devoted himself to the viands with a ravenous gusto, while the old man, leaning backward, watched him with steady, curious eyes.

"You have blood on your shoulder, my man," he said.

Montigny must have laid his wet right hand upon him as he left the house. He cursed Montigny in his heart.

"It was none of my shedding," he stammered.

"I had not supposed so," returned his host quietly. "A brawl?"

"Well, something of that sort," Villon admitted with a quaver.

"Perhaps a fellow murdered?"

"Oh, no, not murdered," said the poet, more and more confused. "It was all fair play— murdered by accident. I had no hand in it, God strike me dead!" he added fervently.

"One rogue the fewer, I dare say," observed the master of the house.

"You may dare to say that," agreed Villon, infinitely relieved. "As big a rogue as there is between here and Jerusalem. He turned up his toes like a lamb. But it was a nasty thing to look at. I dare say you've seen dead men in your time, my lord?" he added, glancing at the armor.

"Many," said the old man. "I have followed the wars, as you imagine."

Villon laid down his knife and fork, which he had just taken up again.

"Were any of them bald?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, and with hair as white as mine."

"I don't think I would mind the white so much," said Villon. "His was red." And he had a return of his shuddering and tendency to laughter, which he drowned with a great draught of wine. "I'm a little put out when I think of it," he went on. "I knew him— damn him! And the cold gives a man fancies— or the fancies give a man cold, I don't know which."

"Have you any money?" asked the old man.

"I have one white," returned the poet, laughing. "I got it out of a dead jade's stocking in a porch. She was as dead as Caesar, poor wench, and as cold as a church, with bits of ribbon sticking in her hair. This is a hard world in winter for wolves and wenches and poor rogues like me."

"I," said the old man, "am Enguerrand de la Feuillée, seigneur de Brisetout, bailli du Patatrac. Who and what may you be?"

Villon rose and made a suitable reverence. "I am called Francis Villon," he said, "a poor Master of Arts of this university. I know some Latin, and a deal of vice. I

can make chansons, ballades, lays, virelais, and roundels, and I am very fond of wine. I was born in a garret, and I shall not improbably die upon the gallows. I may add, my lord, that from this night forward I am your lordship's very obsequious servant to command."

"No servant of mine," said the knight; "my guest for this evening, and no more."

"A very grateful guest," said Villon, politely; and he drank in dumb show to his entertainer.

"You are shrewd," began the old man, tapping his forehead, "very shrewd; you have learning; you are a clerk; and yet you take a small piece of money off a dead woman in the street. Is it not a kind of theft?"

"It is a kind of theft much practised in the wars, my lord."

"The wars are the field of honor," returned the old man proudly. "There a man plays his life upon the cast; he fights in the name of his lord the king, his Lord God, and all their lordships the holy saints and angels."

"Put it," said Villon, "that I were really a thief, should I not play my life also, and against heavier odds?"

"For gain, and not for honor."

"Gain?" repeated Villon with a shrug. "Gain! The poor fellow wants supper, and takes it. So does the soldier in a campaign. Why, what are all these requisitions we hear so much about? If they are not gain to those who take them, they are loss enough to the others. The men-at-arms drink by a good fire, while the burgher bites his nails to buy them wine and wood. I have seen a good many ploughmen swinging on trees about the country; ay, I have seen thirty on one elm, and a very poor figure they made; and when I asked some one how all these came to be hanged, I was told it was because they could not scrape together enough crowns to satisfy the men-at-arms."

"These things are a necessity of war, which the low-born must endure with constancy. It is true that some captains drive overhard; there are spirits in every rank not easily moved by pity; and, indeed, many follow arms who are no better than brigands."

"You see," said the poet, "you cannot separate the soldier from the brigand; and what is a thief but an isolated brigand with circumspect manners? I steal a couple of mutton chops, without so much as disturbing the farmer's sheep; the farmer grumbles a bit, but sups none the less wholesomely on what remains. You come up blowing gloriously on a trumpet, take away the whole sheep, and beat the farmer pitifully into the bargain. I have no trumpet; I am only Tom, Dick, or Harry; I am a rogue and a dog, and hanging's too good for me— with all my heart— but just you ask the farmer which of us he prefers, just find out which of us he lies awake to curse on cold nights."

"Look at us two," said his lordship. "I am old, strong, and honored. If I were turned from my house to-morrow, hundreds would be proud to shelter me. Poor people would go out and pass the night in the streets with their children, if I merely hinted that I wished to be alone. And I find you up, wandering homeless, and picking farthings off dead women by the wayside! I fear no man and nothing; I have seen you tremble and lose countenance at a word. I wait God's summons contentedly in my own house, or, if it please the king to call me out again, upon the field of battle. You look for the gallows; a rough, swift death, without hope or honor. Is there no difference between these two?"

"As far as to the moon," Villon acquiesced. "But if I had been born lord of Brisetout, and you had been the poor scholar Francis, would the difference have been any the less? Should not I have been warming my knees at this charcoal pan, and would not you have been groping for farthings in the snow? Should not I have been the soldier, and you the thief?"

"A thief!" cried the old man. "I a thief! If you understood your words, you would repent them."

Villon turned out his hands with a gesture of inimitable impudence. "If your lordship had done me the honor to follow my argument!" he said.

"I do you too much honor in submitting to your presence," said the knight. "Learn to curb your tongue when you speak with old and honorable men, or some one hastier than I may reprove you in a sharper fashion." And he rose and paced the lower end of the apartment, struggling with anger and antipathy. Villon surreptitiously refilled his cup, and settled himself more comfortably in the chair, crossing his knees and leaning his head upon one hand and the elbow against the back of the chair. He was now replete and warm; and he was in nowise frightened for his host, having gauged him as justly as was possible between two such different characters. The night was far spent, and in a very comfortable fashion after all; and he felt morally certain of a safe departure on the morrow.

"Tell me one thing," said the old man, pausing in his walk. "Are you really a thief?"

"I claim the sacred rights of hospitality," returned the poet. "My lord, I am."

"You are very young," the knight continued.

"I should never have been so old," replied Villon; showing his fingers, "if I had not helped myself with these ten talents. They have been my nursing mothers and my nursing fathers."

"You may still repent and change."

"I repent daily," said the poet. "There are few people more given to repentance than poor Francis. As for change, let somebody change my circumstances. A man must continue to eat, if it were only that he may continue to repent."

"The change must begin in the heart," returned the old man solemnly.

"My dear lord," answered Villon, "do you really fancy that I steal for pleasure? I hate stealing, like any other piece of work or danger. My teeth chatter when I see a gallows. But I must eat, I must drink, I must mix in society of some sort. What the devil! Man is not a solitary animal— *Cui Deus foeminam tradit*. Make me king's pantler— make me abbot of St. Denis; make me bailly of the Patatrac; and then I shall be changed indeed. But as long as you leave me the poor scholar Francis Villon, without a farthing, why, of course, I remain the same."

"The grace of God is all-powerful."

"I should be a heretic to question it," said Francis. "It has made you lord of Brisetout, and bailly of the Patatrac; it has given me nothing but the quick wits under my hat and these ten toes upon my hands. May I help myself to wine? I thank you respectfully. By God's grace, you have a very superior vintage."

The lord of Brisetout walked to and fro with his hands behind his back. Perhaps he was not yet quite settled in his mind about the parallel between thieves and soldiers; perhaps Villon had interested him by some cross-thread of sympathy; perhaps his wits were simply muddled by so much unfamiliar reasoning; but whatever the cause, he somehow yearned to convert the young man to a better way of thinking, and could not make up his mind to drive him forth again into the street.

"There is something more than I can understand in this," he said, at length. "Your mouth is full of subtleties, and the devil has led you very far astray; but the devil is only a very weak spirit before God's truth, and all his subtleties vanish at a word of true honor, like darkness at morning. Listen to me once more. I learned long ago that a gentleman should live chivalrously and lovingly to God, and the king, and his lady; and though I have seen many strange things done, I have still striven to command my ways upon that rule. It is not only written in all noble histories, but in every man's heart, if he will take care to read. You speak of food and wine, and I know very well that hunger is a difficult trial to endure; but you do not speak of other wants; you say nothing of honor, of faith to God and other men, of courtesy, of love without reproach. It may be that I am not very wise— and yet I think I am— but you seem to me like one who has lost his way and made a great error in life. You are attending to the little wants, and you have totally forgotten the great and only real ones, like a man who should be doctoring a toothache on the Judgment Day. For such things as honor and love and faith are not only nobler than food and drink, but, indeed, I think that we desire them more, and suffer more sharply for their absence. I speak to you as I think you will most easily understand me. Are you not, while careful to fill your belly, disregarding another appetite in your heart, which spoils the pleasure of your life and keeps you continually wretched?"

Villon was sensibly nettled under all this sermonizing. "You think I have no sense of honor!" he cried. "I'm poor enough, God knows! It's hard to see rich

people with their gloves, and you blowing your hands. An empty belly is a bitter thing, although you speak so lightly of it. If you had had as many as I, perhaps you would change your tune. Anyway, I'm a thief— make the most of that— but I'm not a devil from hell, God strike me dead. I would have you to know I've an honor of my own, as good as yours, though I don't prate about it all day long, as if it were a God's miracle to have any. It seems quite natural to me; I keep it in its box till it's wanted. Why now, look you here, how long have I been in this room with you? Did you not tell me you were alone in the house? Look at your gold plate! You're strong, if you like, but you're old and unarmed, and I have my knife. What did I want but a jerk of the elbow, and here would have been you with the cold steel in your bowels, and there would have been me, linking in the streets, with an armful of gold cups! Did you suppose I hadn't wit enough to see that? And I scorned the action. There are your damned goblets, as safe as in a church; there are you, with your heart ticking as good as new; and here am I, ready to go out again as poor as I came in, with my one white that you threw in my teeth! And you think I have no sense of honor—God strike me dead!"

The old man stretched out his right arm. "I will tell you what you are," he said. "You are a rogue, my man, an impudent and a black-hearted rogue and vagabond. I have passed an hour with you. Oh! believe me, I feel myself disgraced! And you have eaten and drank at my table. But now I am sick at your presence; the day has come, and the night-bird should be off to his roost. Will you go before, or after?"

"Which you please," returned the poet, rising. "I believe you to be strictly honorable." He thoughtfully emptied his cup. "I wish I could add you were intelligent," he went on, knocking on his head with his knuckles. "Age, age! the brains stiff and rheumatic."

The old man preceded him from a point of self-respect; Villon followed, whistling, with his thumbs in his girdle.

"God pity you," said the lord of Brisetout at the door.

"Good-bye, papa," returned Villon, with a yawn. "Many thanks for the cold mutton."

The door closed behind him. The dawn was breaking over the white roofs. A chill, uncomfortable morning ushered in the day. Villon stood and heartily stretched himself in the middle of the road.

"A very dull old gentleman," he thought. "I wonder what his goblets may be worth."

5: Psyche and the Pskyscraper

O. Henry

1862-1910

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IF YOU ARE a philosopher you can do this thing: you can go to the top of a high building, look down upon your fellow-men 300 feet below, and despise them as insects. Like the irresponsible black waterbugs on summer ponds, they crawl and circle and hustle about idiotically without aim or purpose. They do not even move with the admirable intelligence of ants, for ants always know when they are going home. The ant is of a lowly station, but he will often reach home and get his slippers on while you are left at your elevated station.

Man, then, to the housetopped philosopher, appears to be but a creeping, contemptible beetle. Brokers, poets, millionaires, bootblacks, beauties, hod-carriers and politicians become little black specks dodging bigger black specks in streets no wider than your thumb.

From this high view the city itself becomes degraded to an unintelligible mass of distorted buildings and impossible perspectives; the revered ocean is a duck pond; the earth itself a lost golf ball. All the minutiae of life are gone. The philosopher gazes into the infinite heavens above him, and allows his soul to expand to the influence of his new view. He feels that he is the heir to Eternity and the child of Time. Space, too, should be his by the right of his immortal heritage, and he thrills at the thought that some day his kind shall traverse those mysterious aerial roads between planet and planet. The tiny world beneath his feet upon which this towering structure of steel rests as a speck of dust upon a Himalayan mountain— it is but one of a countless number of such whirling atoms. What are the ambitions, the achievements, the paltry conquests and loves of those restless black insects below compared with the serene and awful immensity of the universe that lies above and around their insignificant city?

It is guaranteed that the philosopher will have these thoughts. They have been expressly compiled from the philosophies of the world and set down with the proper interrogation point at the end of them to represent the invariable musings of deep thinkers on high places. And when the philosopher takes the elevator down his mind is broader, his heart is at peace, and his conception of the cosmogony of creation is as wide as the buckle of Orion's summer belt.

But if your name happened to be Daisy, and you worked in an Eighth Avenue candy store and lived in a little cold hall bedroom, five feet by eight, and earned \$6 per week, and ate ten-cent lunches and were nineteen years old, and got up at 6.30 and worked till 9, and never had studied philosophy, maybe things wouldn't look that way to you from the top of a skyscraper.

Two sighed for the hand of Daisy, the unphilosophical. One was Joe, who kept the smallest store in New York. It was about the size of a tool-box of the D. P. W., and was stuck like a swallow's nest against a corner of a down-town skyscraper. Its stock consisted of fruit, candies, newspapers, song books, cigarettes, and lemonade in season. When stern winter shook his congealed locks and Joe had to move himself and the fruit inside, there was exactly room in the store for the proprietor, his wares, a stove the size of a vinegar cruet, and one customer.

Joe was not of the nation that keeps us forever in a furore with fugues and fruit. He was a capable American youth who was laying by money, and wanted Daisy to help him spend it. Three times he had asked her.

"I got money saved up, Daisy," was his love song; "and you know how bad I want you. That store of mine ain't very big, but—"

"Oh, ain't it?" would be the antiphony of the unphilosophical one. "Why, I heard Wanamaker's was trying to get you to sublet part of your floor space to them for next year."

Daisy passed Joe's corner every morning and evening.

"Hello, Two-by-Four!" was her usual greeting. "Seems to me your store looks emptier. You must have sold a pack of chewing gum."

"Ain't much room in here, sure," Joe would answer, with his slow grin, "except for you, Daise. Me and the store are waitin' for you whenever you'll take us. Don't you think you might before long?"

"Store!"—a fine scorn was expressed by Daisy's uptilted nose—"sardine box! Waitin' for me, you say? Gee! you'd have to throw out about a hundred pounds of candy before I could get inside of it, Joe."

"I wouldn't mind an even swap like that," said Joe, complimentary.

Daisy's existence was limited in every way. She had to walk sideways between the counter and the shelves in the candy store. In her own hall bedroom coziness had been carried close to cohesiveness. The walls were so near to one another that the paper on them made a perfect Babel of noise. She could light the gas with one hand and close the door with the other without taking her eyes off the reflection of her brown pompadour in the mirror. She had Joe's picture in a gilt frame on the dresser, and sometimes—but her next thought would always be of Joe's funny little store tacked like a soap box to the corner of that great building, and away would go her sentiment in a breeze of laughter.

Daisy's other suitor followed Joe by several months. He came to board in the house where she lived. His name was Dabster, and he was a philosopher. Though young, attainments stood out upon him like continental labels on a Passaic (N. J.) suit-case. Knowledge he had kidnapped from cyclopedias and handbooks of useful information; but as for wisdom, when she passed he was left sniffing in the road without so much as the number of her motor car. He could and would tell you the proportion of water and muscle-making properties of peas and veal, the shortest

verse in the Bible, the number of pounds of shingle nails required to fasten 256 shingles laid four inches to the weather, the population of Kankakee, Ill., the theories of Spinoza, the name of Mr. H. McKay Twombly's second hall footman, the length of the Hoosac Tunnel, the best time to set a hen, the salary of the railway post-office messenger between Driftwood and Red Bank Furnace, Pa., and the number of bones in the foreleg of a cat.

The weight of learning was no handicap to Dabster. His statistics were the sprigs of parsley with which he garnished the feast of small talk that he would set before you if he conceived that to be your taste. And again he used them as breastworks in foraging at the boardinghouse. Firing at you a volley of figures concerning the weight of a lineal foot of bar-iron $5 \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and the average annual rainfall at Fort Snelling, Minn., he would transfix with his fork the best piece of chicken on the dish while you were trying to rally sufficiently to ask him weakly why does a hen cross the road.

Thus, brightly armed, and further equipped with a measure of good looks, of a hair-oily, shopping-district-at-three-in-the-afternoon kind, it seems that Joe, of the Lilliputian emporium, had a rival worthy of his steel. But Joe carried no steel. There wouldn't have been room in his store to draw it if he had.

One Saturday afternoon, about four o'clock, Daisy and Mr. Dabster stopped before Joe's booth. Dabster wore a silk hat, and—well, Daisy was a woman, and that hat had no chance to get back in its box until Joe had seen it. A stick of pineapple chewing gum was the ostensible object of the call. Joe supplied it through the open side of his store. He did not pale or falter at sight of the hat.

"Mr. Dabster's going to take me on top of the building to observe the view," said Daisy, after she had introduced her admirers. "I never was on a skyscraper. I guess it must be awfully nice and funny up there."

"H'm!" said Joe.

"The panorama," said Mr. Dabster, "exposed to the gaze from the top of a lofty building is not only sublime, but instructive. Miss Daisy has a decided pleasure in store for her."

"It's windy up there, too, as well as here," said Joe. "Are you dressed warm enough, Daise?"

"Sure thing! I'm all lined," said Daisy, smiling slyly at his clouded brow. "You look just like a mummy in a case, Joe. Ain't you just put in an invoice of a pint of peanuts or another apple? Your stock looks awful over-stocked."

Daisy giggled at her favorite joke; and Joe had to smile with her.

"Your quarters are somewhat limited, Mr.— er— er," remarked Dabster, "in comparison with the size of this building. I understand the area of its side to be about 340 by 100 feet. That would make you occupy a proportionate space as if half of Beloochistan were placed upon a territory as large as the United States east of the Rocky Mountains, with the Province of Ontario and Belgium added."

"Is that so, sport?" said Joe, genially. "You are Weisenheimer on figures, all right. How many square pounds of baled hay do you think a jackass could eat if he stopped brayin' long enough to keep still a minute and five eighths?"

A few minutes later Daisy and Mr. Dabster stepped from an elevator to the top floor of the skyscraper. Then up a short, steep stairway and out upon the roof. Dabster led her to the parapet so she could look down at the black dots moving in the street below.

"What are they?" she asked, trembling. She had never been on a height like this before.

And then Dabster must needs play the philosopher on the tower, and conduct her soul forth to meet the immensity of space.

"Bipeds," he said, solemnly. "See what they become even at the small elevation of 340 feet— mere crawling insects going to and fro at random."

"Oh, they ain't anything of the kind," exclaimed Daisy, suddenly— "they're folks! I saw an automobile. Oh, gee! are we that high up?"

"Walk over this way," said Dabster.

He showed her the great city lying like an orderly array of toys far below, starred here and there, early as it was, by the first beacon lights of the winter afternoon. And then the bay and sea to the south and east vanishing mysteriously into the sky.

"I don't like it," declared Daisy, with troubled blue eyes. "Say we go down."

But the philosopher was not to be denied his opportunity. He would let her behold the grandeur of his mind, the half-nelson he had on the infinite, and the memory he had for statistics. And then she would nevermore be content to buy chewing gum at the smallest store in New York. And so he began to prate of the smallness of human affairs, and how that even so slight a removal from earth made man and his works look like one tenth part of a dollar thrice computed. And that one should consider the sidereal system and the maxims of Epictetus and be comforted.

"You don't carry me with you," said Daisy. "Say, I think it's awful to be up so high that folks look like fleas. One of them we saw might have been Joe. Why, Jiminy! we might as well be in New Jersey! Say, I'm afraid up here!"

The philosopher smiled fatuously.

"The earth," said he, "is itself only as a grain of wheat in space. Look up there."

Daisy gazed upward apprehensively. The short day was spent and the stars were coming out above.

"Yonder star," said Dabster, "is Venus, the evening star. She is 66,000,000 miles from the sun."

"Fudge!" said Daisy, with a brief flash of spirit, "where do you think I come from— Brooklyn? Susie Price, in our store—her brother sent her a ticket to go to San Francisco— that's only three thousand miles."

The philosopher smiled indulgently.

"Our world," he said, "is 91,000,000 miles from the sun. There are eighteen stars of the first magnitude that are 211,000 times further from us than the sun is. If one of them should be extinguished it would be three years before we would see its light go out. There are six thousand stars of the sixth magnitude. It takes thirty-six years for the light of one of them to reach the earth. With an eighteen-foot telescope we can see 43,000,000 stars, including those of the thirteenth magnitude, whose light takes 2,700 years to reach us. Each of these stars—"

"You're lyin'," cried Daisy, angrily. "You're tryin' to scare me. And you have; I want to go down!"

She stamped her foot.

"Arcturus—" began the philosopher, soothingly, but he was interrupted by a demonstration out of the vastness of the nature that he was endeavoring to portray with his memory instead of his heart. For to the heart-expounder of nature the stars were set in the firmament expressly to give soft light to lovers wandering happily beneath them; and if you stand tiptoe some September night with your sweetheart on your arm you can almost touch them with your hand. Three years for their light to reach us, indeed!

Out of the west leaped a meteor, lighting the roof of the skyscraper almost to midday. Its fiery parabola was limned against the sky toward the east. It hissed as it went, and Daisy screamed.

"Take me down," she cried, vehemently, "you— you mental arithmetic!"

Dabster got her to the elevator, and inside of it. She was wild-eyed, and she shuddered when the express made its debilitating drop.

Outside the revolving door of the skyscraper the philosopher lost her. She vanished; and he stood, bewildered, without figures or statistics to aid him.

Joe had a lull in trade, and by squirming among his stock succeeded in lighting a cigarette and getting one cold foot against the attenuated stove.

The door was burst open, and Daisy, laughing, crying, scattering fruit and candies, tumbled into his arms.

"Oh, Joe, I've been up on the skyscraper. Ain't it cozy and warm and homelike in here! I'm ready for you, Joe, whenever you want me."

6: Lady Mary's Bulldog

Fred M. White

1859-1935

Daily News, Perth, 5 May 1911

BUSINESS was not all that it might be, and Mr. John Lenham, sole surviving partner in the firm of Mayfield and Co., of Bond Street, sat in his private office pondering over the problem of cutting down expenses. Really, nobody seemed to want anything in the way of expensive jewellery, for times were bad, and even the foreign colony in Park Lane was feeling the pressure. No doubt the demand for fine diamonds would revive some day, but, meanwhile, the house was hardly paying its expenses. Mr. Lenham thought of his expensive stock and sighed. He sighed for the good old times when— but it was no use to think of that.

From where he sat he could see into the street. He was not too busy that morning, and he was interested to see a carriage and pair of horses draw up before the palatial establishment. Really this looked quite like the old thing. A property turned out equipage before a Bond Street shop was getting as rare as a black swan.

And there was something out of the common in this particular equipage. It had an air of distinction about it, a flavor of old times; not exactly unique, perhaps, but suggestive of the old nobility before Park Lane came into existence and the governing classes took to dabbling on the Stock Exchange. Mr. Lenham was a well-read man, and he instantly thought of Thackeray.

There was nothing shabby about the carriage, though it was mounted on leather springs. The paint work was quite fresh, the varnish glittered in the sun, the harness on the big grey horses was of silver. The coachman had that subtle blend of bishop and prosperous hotel proprietor that coachmen used to have in the days before Shoreditch invaded Belgravia. The footman was only a little less dignified. Mr. Lenham was interested. He was reminded of the stories that his father used to tell.

He was not in the least surprised, therefore, to see descending from the carriage a most delightful old lady in a drawn silk Victorian bonnet. Her hair was beautifully white, her cheeks glowed with a fine healthy red. For the rest, she was clad in satin. She looked very sweet and amiable and refined, and yet withal surrounded by an atmosphere of the most tremendous dignity. It seemed rather incongruous that she should be followed by an immense black-muzzled brindled bulldog.

"Now I wonder who she is?" Lenham pondered. "Aristocrat to her fingertips, quite a survival of the good old school. Mr. Hoggenheimer doesn't dine with her."

Mr. Lenham had not long to wait for enlightenment on the point. A natty, frock-coated assistant rapped on the office door.

"Lady Mary Mountroyal would like to speak to you, sir," the assistant explained.

The name struck a familiar chord. The head of the Mountroyals, of course, was the Duke of Ravenspur, who had many relations. Rapidly Mr. Lenham fluttered over the pages of his Debrett. Lady Mary appeared to be the aunt of the present Duke, and her residence was Strathallen Castle, in the county of Inverness. She appeared to live there with her sister Susan. Here was some of the very best blood in the kingdom.

Mr. Lenham came in with his most grave and courteous manner to the counter. The dainty old lady seated there smiled quite pleasantly.

"It is very many years ago since I was here last, Mr. Lenham," she said. "Really, I am almost afraid to count them. It was in your father's time."

"We have been favored with much Mountroyal patronage, my lady," Lenham said.

"Yes, so my sister, Lady Susan, reminded me. She insisted that if we were to buy this present we should come here. For the bride, you know."

"I am afraid that I don't quite follow, my lady," Lenham murmured.

"Now, that is very stupid of me," Lady Mary replied. "That which is a great event to us is merely an incident in your large business, Mr. Lenham. I am not going to say that we altogether approve of the match; but there it is. My great-nephew, Lord Hindhead, is going to be married, you know. He is at present in America with his father."

Lenham had grasped it now. Lord Hindhead was the future Duke of Ravenspur, and latterly he had become engaged to a great American heiress. Unless the papers were greatly mistaken, he was about to marry a hundred million dollars. The ceremony was to take place in New York in the course of a few weeks.

"Lord Hindhead is a customer of ours," Lenham said.

"Quite so. Now, I may tell you, Mr. Lenham, that Hindhead is a great favorite of ours. The dear boy spent a deal of his youth with us at Strathallen—he was delicate in those days. We should have much preferred to see him marry at home, but we are getting old-fashioned, and, really, nobody takes any notice of what we say. We have sounded our great nephew and he does not seem to want anything for himself. He would much prefer that we sent the bride something. We thought that was rather nice of him."

"A very proper sentiment, my lady," Lenham murmured.

"So that is more or less decided. The question is, what shall we send? I confess that Lady Susan and myself have a little difference of opinion in that respect. The present must take the form of stones, of course; and there we part company. I came to you, Mr. Lenham, without saying anything to my sister. I thought that perhaps with your good taste you could help us a little in the selection."

"It would be a great pleasure, my lady. But, first of all, I should like to have some idea as to the amount you are desirous of spending."

"The amount?" Lady Mary asked, vaguely. "Of course. The amount! Well, let us say something in the region of five or six thousand pounds. I fancy my sister will be ready to meet me to that extent. Might I trouble you for a little water for my dog? I fear that poor Captain feels the heat. Lady Susan insisted upon his coming to town with us."

"A remarkably fine specimen of his kind," Lenham said. "So gentle, too."

"Up to a certain point, yes. We have a score or two at Strathallen. Most of the best bulldogs in England trace their decent back to Strathallen blood. It is really very kind of you to take all this trouble, Mr. Lenham. And now, as we have come to town on purpose to buy this wedding present, I should like to see some choice articles of yours. Lady Susan must be consulted in the final choice, but, unfortunately, she has a slight touch of her neuralgia, and cannot get out."

Lenham proceeded to give certain instructions, and speedily the glass counter was strewn with velvet-lined cases in which gems flashed and dazzled. There was nothing in the least common there, everything was of the best. There were necklets and pendants, and strings of glittering stones until Lady Mary was fain to place her hands to her face and protest that the display was too dazzling for her poor old eyes.

"You have really shown me too much," she said. "Even if it were left to myself, I could not possibly make a selection now. I feel as if I should like to take the whole lot. I could hesitate all day between that pendant and the parure of pearls and rubies. It has always been a weakness of mine that I couldn't make up my mind. I begin to feel sorry now that I didn't leave everything to Lady Susan. Perhaps if I saw one of those lovely things by itself I could make a selection. Those emeralds, for instance. My heart goes out to them. If, when my sister comes, you would produce the emeralds and nothing else it is just possible that—"

Lenham smiled to himself. There appeared to be a good deal of guile, after all, in this exquisite old lady, who bore such a strong resemblance, to one of Cosway's miniatures. But in spite of his amusement Lenham kept an eye to business. There was a chance here of selling two wedding presents instead of one.

"I shall be pleased to do as your Ladyship wishes," he said.

"Now that is very kind of you, Mr. Lenham. A little idea has just occurred to me. Could you come round to our hotel about four this afternoon and bring a lot of those lovely things with you? Or you might only bring the emeralds. On second thoughts I should prefer that you only brought the emeralds. I will tell my sister what I have done, and I am quite sure that she will approve of my choice."

Lenham would be delighted, of course. But he was not going to content himself with the emeralds alone. It was just possible that Lady Susan loathed emeralds.

Lenham knew human nature pretty well, and felt certain that Lady Mary was taking advantage of Lady Susan's neuralgia to steal a march on her. Even sisters who are devoted to each other are guilty of these little diplomacies. When Lenham called at the hotel that afternoon he would have a bagful of other stuff with him.

"I will do as you suggest, my lady," he said. "Where shall I call?"

Lady Mary gave the address. The name of the hotel suggested respectable dinginess, but doubtless it had been exclusive enough half a century ago. But then Lady Mary belonged to the type that never changes. She would probably have repudiated the Carlton or the Ritz with scorn. And in any case it did not matter.

At half-past four the same afternoon Lenham found himself in a sitting-room, furnished precisely as it had been furnished any time the last half century. It was on the first floor, and looked out upon dull red brick houses on the opposite side, which, like itself, were a miracle of ugliness. There were the Brussels carpet with the cauliflower roses on a red ground, the crystal chandeliers on the cold white marble mantelpiece, the chairs upholstered in some alleged velvet material. A large circular table in the centre of the room was littered with a mass of shimmering material that was obviously intended for use by the dressmaker. The table was smothered with it, the clinging folds reached to the floor. Before the fire the bulldog Captain lay licking his black muzzle and turning what seemed like a sour bloodshot eye on the intruder. Lenham felt a creeping up his legs.

A few moments later Lady Mary came in smilingly. "You are very punctual," she said. "My sister and I have a bed-room below this, and I heard you walking about. I have just been giving Lady Susan something for her neuralgia. It makes her very restless and a little ill-tempered. I told her about the emeralds. I am sorry to say that she does not approve of emeralds at all. Still, I am sanguine that when she sees them she may change her mind. If not—"

Lenham signified that it was of no consequence whatever. In any case, he was pleased and proud of the chance of waiting upon Lady Mary. He said nothing as to the contents of the black bag that had been placed on the floor.

"And, besides, there are other things besides emeralds," Lady Mary smiled. "I shall persuade my sister to come and see some of those other lovely things if she is better to-morrow. Still, I have quite set my heart on the emeralds."

"Your Ladyship could not make a better selection," Lenham said. It was time now to unmask his batteries. "I ventured to bring with me in case the emeralds did not—"

"Oh, I am sorry," Lady Mary cried, "That would defeat—but my sister is coming. If you have anything in your pocket that—"

"Not in my pocket, my lady," Lenham explained. "In that little black bag—"

"Then you will be so good as to hide the black bag. How fortunate it is that all this stuff, is littered about. Push the bag under the table. Quick."

Lenham complied discreetly. He laid the bag down carefully in the centre of one of the cauliflower roses and dropped the drapery over it. At the same moment the door of the room opened and Lady Susan came in. She was the exact counterpart of Lady Mary, though her features were a little more commanding and firm. She held a handkerchief to her face, and seemed to be suffering some amount of pain.

"My sister had been telling me what she has done," she said. "It is a great matter of regret to me that Lady Mary has set her mind upon emeralds for this auspicious occasion. In a general way we are devoted to each other; we hardly ever have a difference of opinion. But there are reasons, strong reasons, why I cannot associate myself with a gift of emeralds. If you have anything else with you, Mr. Lenham—"

"But, my dear Susan, surely you will look at the stones!" Lady Mary protested. She spoke just in time to present an indiscretion on Lenham's part. "Without the slightest desire to hurt your feelings, I am sure this prejudice—"

Lady Susan turned with a pallid smile, and said. "For my part, I plead guilty to the charge of prejudice. All the same I am sorry that you should have a wasted journey, Mr. Lenham, and I shall be glad if you will show me the emeralds. I am sure that Lady Mary will never be satisfied till I have looked at them."

Lady Mary checked what was evidently a strong inclination to tears. An unsteady little smile played about her lips. From his pocket Lenham produced the offending case and displayed the beautiful stones on the table. They certainly were very beautiful and very tempting. But Lady Susan's face never relaxed its grimness.

"I have not a word to say against them," she said. "The workmanship is perfect, but I have a strong dislike for emeralds. I am sure, my dear Mary, that you will not make a personal matter of this. We have never had a quarrel yet—"

Lady Mary took a filmy handkerchief from her pocket and pressed it to her eyes. She stood for an instant as if struggling with her feelings, and then with the scrap of lace still to her eyes left the room. Lady Susan sighed.

"An extremely sensitive nature," she said. "Sensitive and tender-hearted from a child! I fear that I have been somewhat hard upon my sister. It is very difficult to know how to deal with her sometimes. Still, I cannot give way on this matter. There are so many lovely things that we might select for Hindhead's bride. If you will excuse me for a moment I'll speak to Lady Mary."

"By all means," Lenham said politely. "Don't let me detain your Ladyship."

A moment later and Lenham had the room to himself. He was feeling quite easy in his mind. He began to see that he was going to sell the emeralds after all. In any case, he was going to sell something. The sisters would probably make up their quarrel, and in the exuberance of their emotion might probably select something valuable from the black bag. But, all the same, the little difference of

opinion was some time in healing, for the clock ticked off half an hour and Lady Susan had not returned.

Lenham was beginning to get just a little uneasy. He could not, of course, put his hand on anything wrong. The ladies were here, and under the table was his black bag. Still, the frauds of jewel thieves are many and peculiar, and Lenham felt a strong desire to have a look at the little black bag just to make sure.

With this purpose apparent in his mind he took a step towards the table. As he did so a deep, angry growl burst from the bulldog standing before the fire. The bloodshot eyes gleamed murderously, the animal advanced on tiptoe. It seemed to Lenham as if he were suddenly turned to stone. A profuse perspiration stood on his forehead. With a certain desperate courage he advanced a hand in the direction of the bell. Another angry snarl and a flash of white teeth warned him to be careful.

Lenham took a pull at his courage. So long as he stood perfectly still nothing appeared likely to happen. Meanwhile the clock was ticking on towards five o'clock, and there was no sign of Lady Susan or her sister. Lenham could hear people moving about the house, and this was some sort of consolation to him. He ventured to call out presently; but then every move on his part affected the dog to still deeper animosity. Once more there was the deep growl and the flash of those great white fangs.

There was nothing for it now but to possess his soul in patience. But Lenham felt that he must know something of the fate of the black bag or perish in the attempt. With his muscles set and stiff he shuffled along by inches still he could touch the table. Very slowly and cautiously he managed to remove the black material, and, with his head on one side, look under the table.

He did not cry out; he did not give vent to any display of passion. For some little time now he had known exactly what had happened. At least, he had felt it in his bones that the black bag had gone. And the bag had not only vanished, but under the table was a large circular hole where the floor had been cut away and bodily removed, the carpet with the cauliflower roses into the bargain.

It was quite dark before anybody came into the room and flicked on the electric light. A waitress stood there regarding Lenham with suspicion and astonishment.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Get that dog away first," Lenham said, hoarsely. "I'll explain afterwards. If I move an inch that brute will fly at my throat."

But, strange to say, the bulldog had already vanished. Probably, from his canine point of view, his task was finished. He wagged his fragment of a tail at her and trotted heavily from the room. Lenham wiped the moisture from his forehead, and passed his tongue over his lips.

"Now, listen to me," he said. "I am a jeweller, and I have been robbed by two thieves staying in this house and passing themselves off as Lady Susan and Lady Mary Mountroyal. If you look at that hole in the floor you will see how the thing was done. I suppose it's no use to ask if these women are still in the house?"

"Gone an hour ago," the girl explained. "Sent off their luggage in advance this morning, and left in a taxi about three-quarters of an hour ago. I suppose they forgot the dog."

"No, they didn't," Lenham said, bitterly. "Nothing of the sort. That confounded dog was part of the programme. I daresay the brute knows exactly where to find them. If you have a telephone in the house, ring up Scotland Yard, and say that Mr. Lenham, of Bond-street, is here, and that he has been robbed in this house of some thousands of pounds' worth of jewellery. Of course, you people don't know anything about it; but the fact is there. I suppose that the ladies' bedroom was immediately underneath this?"

The scared-looking waitress responded that it was. At a sign from Lenham she went off in the direction of the telephone. Half an hour later Lenham, the manageress of the dingy hotel, and Inspector Farrow of Scotland Yard were discussing the situation.

"I'll do my best for you, sir," the latter said. "But I'm afraid it's not much good. The whole thing has been too cleverly planned for that."

"You'll not catch the women?" Lenham asked.

"Well, I'm not quite sure that they are women," Farrow replied. "I don't suppose that women could have cut through the ceiling like that, it looks to me as if you have been made the victim of two exceedingly clever actors. We might manage to get a clue by means of the dog, who is doubtless, back with his masters again by this time. On the other hand, they might have destroyed the dog. He served his part, and is not likely to be tried the same way again. They hired the horses and the carriage, and probably paid for them. In a quiet place like this it would be easy for those people to impersonate Lady Mary and Lady Susan Mountroyal, especially as the ladies never came to London from Scotland. On the whole, it's one of the smartest jewel robberies that ever came under my notice."

"And that's about all the consolation I shall get," Lenham groaned.

"I'm afraid so, sir," Farrow responded. "I can't hold out any hope to you; all I can do is to promise that I'll do my best."

The inspector from Scotland Yard is still doing his best.

7: Doomed Shagshaft of Shagshaft

E. Phillips Oppenheim

Leader (Melbourne, Vic), 3 Sep 1904

Collected in: *Those Other Days*, London, 1912

CALCUTTA, *November* 13.— I have had an adventure to-day. I was riding back here from Tom Sadler's place, where a few of us have been stopping since last Thursday, when I came upon a young lady in distress. She had been trying to ford a swollen stream, and her mare, a leggy, narrow-chested brute, had pretty nearly come to grief. It was a close thing, and no mistake. They'd have been down the stream anyhow in another minute, and I doubt if the great brute wouldn't have dragged her under even if she had been able to swim. Of course I managed to pull her out, and found her not much the worse for her ducking. I took her home, as she really wasn't fit to go alone, but I'm thankful to say that I escaped the parental blessing. The old gentleman— he's a tea-planter— was out, and I pleaded regimental duties as an excuse for hurrying off. Promised to call first opportunity.

November 20.— I can't get that girl's face out of my mind. I don't know that I ever saw a more lovely one. Strange thing for me to do, but I've actually dreamt of her three nights following. What an absurdity!

December 10.— I wish here most distinctly to affirm that I am not a superstitious man. This is a land of weird and fanciful beliefs, but I have always prided myself upon my sound common sense. If anything, I am a little too much inclined to absolute materialism, and yet what I now set down I believe to be the sober truth. I have seen a ghost. Three times during the middle of the night last week I have seen a woman in my room, standing just inside the door, with her hands stretched out appealingly towards me, and her face was the face of the girl whom I dragged out of the water near Tom Sadler's place scarcely a month ago. God grant that I may not see it again.

June 13.— As long as I live this day, or rather last night, will dwell in my mind. What have I done that I should be thus tormented? My nerves are completely shattered, and every one tells me that I look like a ghost. Again last night, it, or she, came, and as I sat up in bed I saw her scarcely a yard away, and her hands, which she held out as before, were red with blood. I saw it dripping slowly on to the floor, and I saw her look of horror as she drew back and pointed to the stain. Then I jumped out of bed, but she vanished with a last imploring gesture, and there was no stain on the mats. Another night like last night, and the fever will have me.

June 13.— Thank God I have seen no more of it. 'This afternoon I am going up country to seek her at the house. I doubt whether I shall find her alive.

June 20.— Just returned. I found the house shut up, and learnt that the late proprietor had died five months ago, and that his daughter had gone to Europe. I scarcely know whether I dread or long most to see her again.

June 30.— The mail has brought me strange news. My uncle and cousin have died suddenly, and I am Sir Reginald Shagshaft of Shagshaft Castle, Northumberland, and owner of more thousands a year than I have ever had hundreds. Good-bye to India, and the army! I sail for England in a week.

November 20.— I am at Shagshaft Castle, and a grand old place it is, but terribly desolate. It is built on the summit of a cliff, and a couple of hundred feet below as wild-looking a grey sea as ever I saw in my life thunders in upon a rocky storm-bound coast. When I have set things a little in order, I shall go to Paris for a while. The screech of the sea gulls alone is enough to give one the horrors, and in all this great place there are only three servants, for not a girl in all the country side will come here because of the ghost, which is said to inhabit the western wing and to walk in the black copse. Mrs. Cross, the housekeeper, seems a decent sort of person, but she firmly believes in the ghost, and came to me yesterday with tears in her eyes imploring me not to intrude upon its haunts. I ought to have humoured her a little, I think; for when I told her that I should make a point of finding out all about this ghost with a view to evicting it, and that I should fill the place with London servants, she turned as pale as a sheet, and very nearly went into hysterics. I have always heard that north-country people are superstitious.

November 21.— I can't understand Mrs. Cross at all. To-day she would persist in telling me the story of a terrible tragedy which took place near here a few months ago— a man murdered by a girl— and insisted upon my giving my opinion about it. I said that if the story she told was true, it served the man right— and so it did. She seemed unaccountably pleased at my answer.

November 22.— I walked in the black copse to-night, but saw nothing of the ghost. I shall leave here in a week.

November 23.—A touch of my old madness has returned. Unless my eyes can lie I have seen this ghost. I was in the garden last night, and distinctly saw a white figure move along the battlements of the western tower and disappear. It was the figure of a woman, and, strange though it may appear, it seemed somehow familiar to me.

November 24.— Again I have seen the ghost. As I live I will find out what this means. I have not worn the V.C. for nothing, and no one has ever called Colonel Shagshaft a coward. I will stand face to face with this tormenting shadow, and with my own hands will find out whether or no my senses are mocking me.

November 25.— To-night I stood on the battlements of the western wing and waited, with my sword in my hand, for well-nigh three hours. It never came. When I descended, I found Mrs. Cross in a fit. It seems strange that she should be so anxious. She feared for my safety, she declared trembling; and if anything happened to me, strangers would come to the old place. For I am the last of the Shagshafts of Shagshaft.

November 26.— This morning I asked Mrs. Cross for an old manuscript copy of the history of Shagshaft Castle, as I fancied that I had heard something about a secret room in the western wing.

What a nervous woman she is! I had scarcely got the words out before she fainted. There is something all about this which I cannot understand. When she came to, she declared solemnly that she had never heard of such a book. This must be false, for I have often been told about it; anyhow, I was only the more determined to thoroughly explore the western wing, so I commenced at once. On the topmost storey, starting from the centre tower, and going to the right, I counted thirteen rooms, all large, empty, and in a neglected state. When I reached the furthestmost, I turned round with a start to find Mrs. Cross just behind me. At the sight of her my suspicions were at once thoroughly aroused.

"Mrs. Cross," I said quietly, "I am quite aware that I am getting warm; in other words, that I shall unearth this precious ghost in something less than five minutes. Now let me tell you this," I continued, drawing a small pocket revolver: "I am going to put an end to this confounded masquerading once and for all."

She drew close to him.

"You have found the book!" she gasped. "You know about the secret chamber!"

"Precisely!" I answered. "And it will go ill with its tenant."

Then she fell on her knees before me.

"For the love of God don't hurt her, Sir Reginald," she moaned. "Doan't 'e give her up; so young as she is and so beautiful, and so innocent like. She'd never 'a hurt a hair of old Roger Martin's head if he hadn't offered her an insult worse nor death; and she ne'er meant to kill him. He tried to take the gun frae 'er, and it went off. What could 'a do when she came to me for help but hide her. Oh, Sir Reginald! you're the last Shagshaft o' Shagshaft, but, afore God, I'll curse 'ee if 'ee hurt her, or give her up to the law."

"Stand up, woman, and tell me whom you have been hiding," I cried.

She trembled all over.

"Her as killed old Roger Martin, the wickedest man in all the country side. Her father left her to his care. Little he could 'a knowed what sort of a man he was; and she came from India here last April—"

Down fell the revolver from my nerveless fingers, and I bent eagerly forward.

"The date! What was the day of the month when she— she did this deed?"

"It wur the night o' the eleventh o' June—"

She stopped short. My eyes followed hers, and standing in an aperture of the wall at the other end of the room, her arms stretched out appealingly to me, was the figure of a young girl. I knew her at once, and a cold shiver went through me. I had seen her before in her drenched riding-hood on the banks of tile Ghooly stream, and I had seen her, too, in this same posture by my bedside at the barracks in Calcutta. And yet on that same night she had been many thousand miles away. My eyes remained fixed upon her— fascinated. No longer could I call myself a brave man, for I was trembling.

"Sir Reginald Shagshaft, I—"

She stopped short and put her hand to her forehead. Then she moved swiftly into the room and threw herself on her knees before me.

"Oh, it is you," she cried joyfully; "you, who saved me from drowning in the Ghooly river You will not give me up? You will let me stay here? Before God, I swear to you that I never meant to hurt him."

Her voice failed her, and her lithe, supple frame was convulsed with sobs. I spoke as one in a dream.

"I will not give you up or turn you away," I promised. "I will come to you to-morrow, and you shall tell me all about it."

Then I staggered out of the room like a drunken man, and left them weeping for joy.

November 27.— Most of the day I have spent with Maud Moray, and I have heard her story. Her father had died suddenly and had left her to the guardianship of an old Northumbrian squire, a distant relative, whom he had never seen. She had come over to England, and had found that her new home was a tumble-down farmhouse on a wild, desolate moor, and that her guardian was a man of evil repute— a drunkard, and worse. She was only two miles away from Shagshaft Castle, and she had often visited it, and, by her wondering praise of its grandeur and antiquity, had first won Mrs. Cross's heart. Then had come a terrible night when, flushed with drink, old Roger Martin had been sent to his doom by a desperate girl. I pass over her hasty, reluctant description of that awful scene. In her horror at what she had done her first instinct had been to fly, and she had found her way by the pale light of the moon across the bleak moor to Shagshaft Castle. She had lain hidden in the black copse, where none dare venture after

nightfall, until morning, and then she had crept into Mrs. Cross's room and told her terrible tale. What could Mrs. Cross do but promise to try and hide her? Roger Martin had been her sworn enemy, and the news of his death was a joy to her. There and then she had promised to do her best to shield this unhappy girl from the consequences of her rash deed. There was a part of the Castle which neither man nor woman for many miles round dare visit, for, from time immemorial, it has been steadfastly believed to be haunted by the ghost of a former lady of Shagshaft. And so she had unlocked the secret chamber which none save she knew of, and Maud Moray had taken up her abode there. To increase the awe with which that part of the Castle was already looked upon by the rustics, she had now and then walked on the battlements at night clad in a white gown. So well had she succeeded that one by one the servants had fled away, and had left Mrs. Cross almost alone. Then had come the news of my unexpected arrival— I had not written until I arrived in England— and for a while their anxiety had been intense. I shall never forget how Mrs. Cross sobbed for joy when I gave that hasty promise or how beautiful she looked on her knees before me, with her golden hair streaming down her back, and her great blue eyes fixed upon mine, full of passionate entreaty. Justice or no justice, no man shall lay a hand upon her in my house.

November 28.— Mine is a terrible position. I am an officer in the service of the Queen, and I am wilfully harbouring a criminal. I learnt to-day that there is a warrant out for her arrest, and the whole country is being scoured for her. I defy them to find her here. Still I am nervous, and live in perpetual dread. Most of the day I have spent with her. She is very beautiful.

December 2.— I was never a fatalist, but every idea of mine is unhinged by the strange thing which has happened to me. It seems almost as if some invisible hand had drawn us together. I give up fighting against it. I confess that I am madly in love with Maud Moray. Death alone shall part us; I have sworn it.

December 3.— Another day of wild delirious happiness. She has confessed that she loves me. I have given up fighting against fate. Were she the blackest-hearted of women, instead of a pure innocent girl driven to defend her honour by desperate means, she should still be mine. We will go away together, to some far country, where she will be safe, and we can live in peace. For her sake I will welcome exile for ever from England and home.

December 12.— I have made plans. There is a steamer starts from Liverpool for Buenos Ayres in a month's time. We will go by it. Maud is willing and anxious

to escape from her confinement. We can be married on board. Our chief difficulty will be in getting Maud away from this place.

December 20.—We have made arrangements about getting Maud away. Mrs. Cross has a niece about her height and complexion, whom she is to invite to stop here for a few days. Then Maud is to wear her clothes and leave in her stead. At Atwick I shall join her, and we shall go straight to Liverpool. God grant that there may be no slip! How I long for freedom, and to escape from this constant anxiety!

December 25.—It is Christmas Day, and our last day here. Mrs. Cross's niece has arrived. Except that she is not one-tenth part as beautiful, she is not unlike Maud. All our arrangements are made. Nothing can go wrong; and yet I feel strangely depressed and nervous. The slightest noise makes me start. My heart seems dragged down as though by a weight of lead, and my blood is like ice. I have been drinking wine, but it does me no good. It seems to freeze within me, and I am cold. It must be this cursed damp room. 'Twould hold an army, and the table at which I dine would seat two hundred. This place is too big: it oppresses me. Good God I...

I must be ill. I could have sworn that it was she who came out of the shadows there, with her arms outstretched, just as I saw her in my room at Calcutta. What a superstitious fool I am! Can it be that the twilight is making a coward of me? It looks like it, for my limbs are trembling, and the cold sweat is running down my forehead. I must have some wine.

Now, I feel better. How strange it seems that in this great place she and I are alone! Mrs. Cross and her niece have gone down to the village, and the last of the remaining servants left us yesterday. "She couldn't spend Christmas day in a haunted house," she said. How the wind is howling through those pine trees in the black copse. This is certainly the weirdest and the dreariest place I was ever in. One can imagine the people being superstitious. The moaning of the sea on the beach below is enough to give one the melancholies. I feel drowsy. I...

I have had a sleep and again the nightmare. I fancied that I heard her calling to me to save her. It must have been the sighing of the wind in the black copse. My God! What a blaze of light! Can it be daytime? Dark figures on the lawn! My God! What is this?...

[End of Diary]

FIRE AT SHAGSHAFT CASTLE! and such a fire. Sheets of flame, leaping and curling round the grand old towers and blackened walls, shooting torrents of sparks high up into the air, bending low before the wild gusts of the storm-wind which urged it forward, and casting a red, hellish glare far out into the sea below,

and high up into the heavens above. Never have the little knot of villagers, who are clustering together upon the lawn, seen or imagined anything so wildly, so fearfully grand. And from that fast grim pile of buildings there comes no sound or sign of life. Almost it seems that those within are sleeping the sleep of the dead.

Suddenly a window on the ground floor is thrown open with a crash, and a tall, military-looking man, with a note book in his hand, leaps out on to the lawn. He stares for a moment aghast, petrified, at the burning pile. Before he can speak or move, there is a low shuddering murmur from those around him, and all eyes are riveted upon the western wing.

"The ghost! The ghost!"

High up on the battlements of the doomed castle, her figure standing out with startling distinctness against the glowing background, a woman, in a long white robe, is standing. The flames, which bend and roll towards her, do her one good service; every one can see her desperate strait. They can see her fair hair streaming in the wind, her white arms stretched imploringly out towards one figure on the lawn, and can almost see her lips part in an agonized appeal.

He sees it all, and, with a wild cry which rises high above the roaring and crashing of the fire, he dashes through the smoke into the burning building. Some try to follow him, and some run for ladders; but all in vain. None other save he dare face the sheets of flame, nor will all the rapidly procured ladders reach half way to those frowning battlements, and so they wait in a breathless silence—thrilled, but helpless.

Minutes pass, and the flames are rapidly nearing the woman, who stands there motionless, like a Grecian statue. Then there is a wild shout as the blackened figure of a man leaps on to the roof by her side. She welcomes him with a great cry of joy, and for a moment they disappear, but only to return again. Their retreat has been cut off. They are doomed. They stand there, against the lurid sky, clasped in one another's arms—hero and heroine, facing death together as they could never have faced it apart. And on the lawn below the women are swooning and strong men fall sobbing to the ground that their fascinated eyes may not rest upon the awful sight.

ONE MAN ALONE had nerve enough to look upon it, and, with bated breath, he is often called upon to tell the tale. So often, that in that dreary Northumbrian village there is not a man, woman, or child who does not know by heart the story of how the last Lord of Shagshaft died like a hero amongst the ruins of his castle, with the beautiful Shagshaft ghost, for whom he had given his life, clasped in his arms.

8: The Story of Amaroff the Pole

B. Fletcher Robinson

1871-1907

Collected in: *The Chronicles of Addington Peace*, 1905

"YOU MAY THINK yourself an artist," wrote my uncle, "but I call you a silly young fool."

I remembered the sentence and the reading of it well enough, though time has not stood idle since that September evening of the year 1892. From the point of view of Bradford, my uncle might be right; but what did he know, I argued, of the higher ideal which I had chosen, preferring the development of my artistic sense to the mere accumulation of money that I could not spend? Where was his joy of life— he who spent his days in the whirr of wheels and the fog of many chimneys? How could it compare with mine in the ancient peace of the eighteenth-century house that lay under the towers that crowned the ancient abbey at Westminster? I looked around me at the delicate tapestries that I had brought from Florence to my London rooms; at the glowing Fragonards— souvenirs of my year of artistic study in Paris; at the Dresden groups redolent of old Saxony. Was I the fool or my uncle George? There seemed to me no doubt about it. It was plainly Uncle George.

Yet the letter had unsettled me. I opened the swing doors that led to my studio, switched on the light, and stepped from easel to easel, examining my half-finished work with a growing dissatisfaction. Were they indeed merely the daubs of a wealthy amateur? I loitered back to my sitting-room in a sulky depression, and had picked up an art paper, when there came a tapping at the door, and the grizzled head of old Jacob Hendry came peering in. A perfect servant was old Hendry, once sergeant of infantry, and now a combination of cook, valet, and housemaid, who kept my rooms in spotless order, grilled a steak to a turn, was a fair hand with a needle, and spent his spare time in producing the most inartistic wood carving I have ever seen.

"Well, and what is it?" I asked him; for he seemed in some hesitation.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Phillips, sir," he said, "but there's a young man would like to see you. A most respectable young man, sir, as lodges above us on the third floor, but—"

"Go on, Jacob, go on."

"The fact is, sir, he's from the Yard."

"The Yard! What Yard?"

"Scotland Yard, sir, where the detectives come from."

And where I wish to Heaven they would remain, thought I.

This intrusion was simply insufferable. I had a mind to refuse the man admittance.

"'Is boots is quite clean," said Jacob, entirely mistaking my hesitation. "'E 'as wiped 'em on the mat. I saw 'im."

"Oh, show him in."

"The person, sir, of the name of Inspector Peace," said Hendry, swinging open the door.

He was a tiny slip of a fellow, of about five and thirty years of age. A stubble of brown hair, a hard, clean-shaven mouth, and a confident chin— such was my impression. He took one quick look at me, and then waited, with his eyes on the carpet and his head a trifle tilted over the right shoulder.

"I fear that I have taken a great liberty, Mr. Phillips," he said, in a very smooth and civil manner. "But I had an idea that you would help me, and time was of importance."

"Well, and what is it?"

"You have many friends amongst the foreign artists here in London. You attend their concerts and sometimes even their little dances. We are near neighbours, you see," he concluded, with a slight bow, that was at once an apology and an explanation.

"I am flattered by the interest you have taken in my movements."

"Two hours ago," he continued cheerfully, "a body was found in a passage off Leman Street, Stepney— a body which we cannot identify. The man was of good position, a sculptor, and, I believe, a Pole. A cab is waiting at the door. It is late, I know, Mr. Phillips; it cannot fail to be a great personal inconvenience; but will you drive down with me and take a look at him?"

"Certainly not."

He saw that I considered his proposal an impertinence, for he hesitated a moment, regarding me with an air of depression.

"It has stopped raining," he said, "and the cab has most comfortable cushions. I noticed a fur coat in the hall which can be slipped on in a moment. May I fetch it for you?"

"You merely waste time, Mr. Peace," I told him, "I will have nothing to do with an affair in which I am nowise concerned."

"This sculptor may be an acquaintance of your own," he said gravely; "and while we are arguing, his murderers may escape."

"Murderers?"

"Yes, sir; murderers! The man has been strangled and robbed."

The position was most embarrassing. He asked me to go into a part of London that I had always carefully avoided. It was sufficient to know that filth, immorality, and crime exist without personally inspecting the muck-heap. Yet there he stood, his head on one side, staring at my toes like an inquisitive terrier, and my arguments faded before his stolidity. Why had Hendry ever let him in? I should certainly speak to the old rascal about his—

"Well, Mr. Phillips."

"If I agree to go, will you see to it that I am not again troubled in this matter?" I answered sulkily enough. "For I will not be a witness or a juryman or anything like that, you understand?"

"Certainly. I will see that you are not further molested."

"Then, in the name of common sense, let us get it over as quickly as possible," I said, kicking off my slippers and ringing the bell for my boots.

Big Ben was striking eleven as our hansom trotted down the long Embankment with its lights winking on the rushing tide below. Past the great restaurants of pleasure, glowing with shaded lamps from the windows of all their balconies; into the silent city where the tall offices of the day lay like deserted palaces under the moon; over macadam, over clattering asphalt, over greasy wood pavement; so we journeyed till of a sudden we dropped from wealth to destitution, from solitude to babble, from the West to the East. Costers bawling their wares under spouting flares, fringed the sidewalks along which jostled the chattering masses of the poor. The section was largely foreign. The patches of colour in some Italian shawl, the long coats and peaked headgear of some moujik, the clatter of the dialects seemed all the stranger from the sullen London background of mean shops, dingy lodgings, and low beer-houses. For, in the shadows of that underworld of the great metropolis, sodden faces, guttural oaths, dingy rags, the blow that precedes the word, are the manifestations of the native born.

In a side street the cab drew to a standstill. It was the mortuary, the inspector told me. A young policeman at the door touched his hat, and led the way down a passage to a bare stone chamber. On a slab in the centre the body lay with an elderly man in ill-fitting clothes bending over it. He looked up as we entered, and nodded to the inspector.

"You were quite right, Peace," he said cheerfully; "chloroform first, strangling afterwards."

"They took no risks, Dr. Chappie."

"They made a clean job of it," said the elderly man, looking down at the slab with his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets. "Never saw neater work since— well, since I was invalided home from India."

"Thugs?"

"Yes; they did it nigh as well as a Thug in regular practice."

The callous brutality of the conversation filled me with disgust. I turned away, leaning against the wall with a feeling of nausea.

"And now, if I may trouble you, Mr. Phillips, will you look at this poor fellow, and see if you can recognize him?" said Peace.

I knew him well enough. The black beard, the thin, hawk nose, the high and noble forehead were not easily forgotten. Talman introduced me to him at the Art Club's Reception in July, whispering that he was a Pole and a neighbour of his— a

deuced queer fish, though a clever one. He had exhibited a bust of Nero at the Academy, which attracted much attention.

"And his name?" asked the inspector.

"Amaroff. I believe him to be from Poland; that is about all I know of him."

"How did you come to meet him?"

I told him of my introduction. Would I, he asked, give him Talman's address? Most certainly— No. 4, Harden Place, off the King's Road, Chelsea. I had no objection whatever to Talman being roused at one in the morning. By all means let the old rascal be turned out of bed and cross-examined. His language would be a revelation to the police— it would, really.

The inspector left me on the doorstep for a few minutes, while he whispered to two shabbily dressed men who lounged out of the darkness, and disappeared with the same lack of ostentation. Then we entered our cab, which had waited, and trotted westward, the very air growing clearer, as it seemed to me, when the underworld of poverty fell away behind us. It was some time before I spoke, and then it was to ask for a solution to certain puzzles that had been forming in my brain.

"You said he had been robbed?" I began.

"Yes, Mr. Phillips. They had gone through his pockets with every attention to detail."

"Then how did you know he was a sculptor?"

"He had been called away in a hurry. There was modelling clay in his finger-nails, and a splash of plaster on his right trouser leg. It was quite simple, as you see."

His reply was ingenious, and I liked the inspector the better for it. The man had something more in him than a civil tongue and a pleasing manner.

"Tell me— what else did you learn?"

"That he was murdered in a place with a sanded floor, probably at no great distance from Leman Street, seeing that they carried him there on a coster's barrow."

"I am not a reporter," I said. "I do not want guess-work."

"I shall probably be able to prove my words in twenty-four hours."

"And why not now?"

"There are good reasons."

"Oh, very well," I said sulkily; and we drove on through the night in silence.

He left me at my door amid polite assurances that I should not again be troubled in the matter. I told him quite frankly that I was very glad to hear it.

I did not sleep more than eight hours that night, and was quite unfitted for work in the morning. I roamed about my studio with nerves on edge. I cursed Peace and all his doings. Even the papers gave me no further information of this exasperating business, being loaded with the preparations for the Czar's reception

in Paris, which was due in two days. In the end I sank so far as to send old Jacob up to the inspector's rooms for the latest hews; but he had been out since daybreak.

About twelve I wandered off to the club. The sight of Talman was a very present joy to me. He was engaged in denouncing the police to a select circle, choosing as his text that the Englishman's house in his castle. I offered my sincere sympathy when he told me that he had been invaded at one in the morning by inquiring detectives. I suggested that he should write to the *Times* about it. He said he had already done so. Incidentally he mentioned that Amaroff's address had been No. 21, Harden Place.

I lunched at the little table by the window; but it was in the smoking-room afterwards that the idea occurred to me. I fought against it for some time, but the temptation increased upon consideration. Finally I yielded, and told the waiter to call a cab. I would myself have a look at the dead man's studio.

I dismissed the hansom at the turning off King's Road, and walked down Harden Place on foot. It was an eddy in the rush of London improvement— a pool of silence in its roaring traffic. There were trees in the little gardens. The golds and browns of the withering leaves peeped and rustled over the old brick walls. Several studios I noticed— it was evidently an artists' quarter— before I stopped in front of No. 21.

The studio— a fair-sized barn of modern brick— fronted on the street. The double doors through which a sculptor's larger work may pass were flanked by a little side door painted a staring and most objectionable green. On the right the roof of a red-tiled shed crept up to long windows under the eaves. The side door stood ajar— a most urgent invitation to my curiosity. After all, I argued, a studio remains a place where the strict rules of etiquette may be avoided, even though its owner be dead. And so, without troubling farther in the matter, I pushed the door gently open, and walked into a short passage, the further end of which was barred with heavy curtains of faded plush. Beyond them I could hear a whisper of voices. I drew back the edge of a curtain and peeped within.

In the centre of the big room was a tall pedestal upon which was set the bust of Nero, which had won no small measure of fame for poor Amaroff in that year's Academy. Under the proud and merciless features of the Roman Emperor stood Inspector Peace— smoking a cigarette and talking to a big fellow with a thick black beard.

A couple of men kneeling at their feet were replacing a mass of loose papers in the drawers of a roller-top desk that had been pulled some distance from the wall

I was just about to announce myself, when one of the men knocked over a brass candlestick which stood on the desk, so that it rolled to the further side. With a grunt of annoyance, he stepped leisurely round and dropped on his knees to recover it. Once out of eight of his companions, however, he whipped out a square of wax from his pocket, and with extraordinary rapidity took an impression

from a key that he had kept concealed in his hand. It was all over in five seconds, and from the shelter the desk gave to him, no one but myself could have been the wiser. He rose, replaced the candlestick, and continued his work.

Whether the fellow had played his companion a trick or not, I had no desire to be caught acting the spy. So, pulling the curtains aside, I walked into the room. They all turned quickly upon me, the black-bearded man staring hard as if attempting to recall my face. But Peace was the first to speak.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Phillips," he said, as if I were a visitor he had expected. "You are just in time to drive me back. Have you a cab waiting?"

"No." I hesitated;

"It's of no consequence. We can find another at the top of the street. And now, Mr. Nicolin," he continued, turning to the big man, who had never taken his eyes off me, "are you quite satisfied, or do you wish your men to make a further search?"

"No, Mr. Inspector," he answered, with a heavy foreign accent, "we are quite content. Noding more is necessary."

"Shall you be wanting to come again?"

"No— for us it is sufficient. It is for you to continue, Mr. Inspector. You tink you will catch these men who kill him, hein?"

"We shall try," said Peace, with a modest droop of the eyes.

"Ach— but where can there be certainty in our lives? Come now, my children, let us be going. Alexandre, you have the door-key of the studio; give him to the inspector here."

So it was the door-key, thought I, of which Mr. Alexandre obtained a memento behind the roller-top desk!

Peace gave a polite good-bye to his companions on the step, locked up the little green door, and then started down the street at my side.

I had no business to come poking my nose into your affairs," I said. "Anything you say I shall thoroughly deserve."

"Don't apologize," he smiled. "I was pleased to see you."

"And why?"

"You can do better things than remain a wealthy dilettante, Mr. Phillips. You are too broad in the shoulders, too clear in the head, for living in the world that is dead. Such little incidents as these— they drag you out of the shell you are building about you. That is why I was pleased to see you. I have spoken plainly— are you offended?"

"Oh no," I said, waving my stick to a passing hansom, though I did not refer again to the topic which I foresaw was likely to become personally offensive to me.

He sat back in his corner of the cab, filling his pipe with dextrous fingers, while I watched him out of the corner of my eye. When it was well alight, he began again on a new subject.

"London's a queer place," he said, "though perhaps you have not had the time to find it out. There are foreign colonies, with their own religions and clubs and politics, working their way through life just as if they were in Odessa or Hamburg or Milan. There are refugees— Heaven knows how many, for we do not— that have fled before all the despotisms that succeeded and all the revolutions that failed from Siam to the Argentine. Tolstoi fanatics, dishonest presidents, anarchists, royalists, Armenians, Turks, Carlists, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia— a finer collection than even America itself can show. On the Continent— well, we should be running them in, and they would be throwing bombs. But here no one troubles them so long as they pay rent and taxes, and keep their hands out of each other's pockets or from each other's throats. They understand us, too, and stop playing at assassins and conspirators. But once in a while habit is too strong for them, and something happens."

"As it happened to Amaroff?"

"Yes— as it happened to Amaroff."

"It was a political crime?"

"Yes."

"And the reasons?"

"They have the advantage of simplicity. Amaroff was a member of the Russian secret-service, detailed to mix with and observe the Nihilist refugees. The Czar enters Paris in two days, and when the Czar travels the political police of all the capitals are kept on the run. I suppose Amaroff showed an excess of zeal that made his absence from London desirable. Anyway, he was found dead, and the Russians reasonably conclude it is the Nihilists who killed him."

"Who were those men in the studio?"

"The big fellow was Nicolin, the head of the Russian service over here. I don't know a better man in his profession nor one with fewer scruples. The other two were assistants. They came down to the Yard this morning with a request that they might search the studio for certain private papers which Amaroff had and which belonged to them. So we fixed the appointment into which you have just walked."

"And they finished their search?"

"You heard them say so."

"Exactly; but why, then, did they want an impression of the studio key?"

He turned upon me with a sudden impatience in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I told him of my arrival, and what I had seen from my post behind the curtains of the doorway. He did not speak when I had finished, but sat, puffing at his short pipe, and staring out over the horse's ears. So we arrived at our door.

"If you have further news to-night will you call in before going to bed?" I asked him as we stood on the pavement.

"I cannot promise you that I have some important inquiries to make in the East End this evening, and I do not know when I shall return."

I suppose I looked depressed at his answer; indeed the prospect of a lonely evening in my rooms with such a mystery in course of solution outside, seemed oddly distasteful to me.

"It is a rough district, as you know," he said, watching me; "but would you care to come along?"

"There is nothing I should like better," I answered simply.

"Well— it's against the regulations; but they allow me some license. Be ready at nine, and I will call for you. Wear old clothes, a cap and a scarf round your neck to hide your collar. Is that understood?"

"Yes," I said, and so it was settled between us.

We were punctual in our meeting, and trotted eastward over the roads we had covered on the previous day. When we stopped it was at a narrow rift in a wall of mean dwellings. We dismissed the cab and threaded our way down the alley, which opened out upon a miserable square. The houses that surrounded it had once been of some pretension. In a simpler age merchants had doubtless lived there, men who owned the tall ships that had lain in the river near by. But now the porticos had crumbled, the iron railings had bent and rusted, the plaster had fallen in speckled patches from the walls. In the centre a few ancient trees still dragged on a disconsolate existence. It was a silent place where wheeled traffic never came. And when, through an upper window, a woman suddenly poured forth shrill abuse upon a drunken man clinging to the railings, each oath rang loudly in the furtive silence.

As we paused at the mouth of the alley, a tall man, with a drooping yellow moustache, brushed by us; and when we turned into a beer-house at the corner he followed us, standing a little apart in an angle of the bar.

There were half a dozen men and women— of the life wreckage of the great city— sitting on the benches; but before the inspector was served with the drinks he ordered, they had whispered one to another and melted away. As the last one slunk through the door, Peace beckoned to the tall man, who joined us.

"Well, Jackson," he said, "you can't hide your light under a bushel in Stepney, that's certain."

"I'm afraid not, sir," he grinned. "Leastways not in Maiden Square."

"Well, have you found the place? Oh, that is all right," for the man had glanced at me with a brief suspicion. "This is Mr. Phillips, who has been of much

service to me in our little affair; let me introduce you to Serjeant Jackson, Mr. Phillips."

I shook hands with the serjeant, who said that he would take a glass of beer.

"And the place?" asked Peace, when we had seated ourselves on a corner bench out of earshot of the man behind the bar— a bottle-nosed ruffian, who watched us furtively as he rinsed the dirty glasses.

"That's the address, sir," said the serjeant, handing his superior a crumpled sheet of paper.

"A club, is it?" he said, glancing up in his quick, bird-like way. "And what sort of a club?"

"Foreign, sir. They call themselves social democrats, but our special branch men tell me that a full half of the crowd are anarchists, and such rats as that. I think it must be so, for Nicolin and his Russians have had the place under close observation for weeks. And you know what that means, sir."

"Yes, I know what that means."

"Amaroff was not a member, but used to drop in there from time to time. He was very thick with the man who runs the place, Greatman, as he calls himself. They tell me that Greatman sat as a model for some statue he was doing, back in July. It must have been a funny sort of statue, for Greatman's a weedy little Pole, and drinks like a fish."

For some time the inspector sat in silence, drawing circles on the floor with the point of the light cane he carried. The bar-tender dropped a glass, swore, and then, with a stare at us, retreated into a little cage he had at the back of his domain. Doubtless the presence of detectives was no incentive to trade in the bars of Maiden Square.

"This Greatman— what more do you know of him?"

"We have had nothing against him before; but all the same, it's his private room that has the sanded floor."

The inspector's prophecy of the previous night came back to me with a sudden remembrance: "Amaroff was murdered in a room with a sanded floor, probably at no great distance from Leman Street, seeing that they carried him there in a coster's barrow." I began to understand the morbid significance of the private room in this little foreign club. We were drawing nearer to our garner; the scent was growing stronger. Peace leant a little forward, with a twist in his jaw that raised a ripple of muscles under the skin.

"Continue, if you please," he said.

"It's at the rear of the club, and there is a back staircase to a yard behind, where costers store their barrows when not in use. It fits in with what you told us to inquire for, don't it, sir?"

"Yes."

The inspector's stick recommenced its interlacing circles on the floor; and we sat and watched, as if thereby he were disentangling his sordid story. So still were we all that the bar-tender poked his luminous nose from his cage in the hope that we had gone. He withdrew it with remarks on the police force which were distinctly audible, and opposed to the complimentary. Suddenly the inspector turned to me with a motion of half-apology, as if at the neglect of a guest.

"There are times, Mr. Phillips," he said, "when evidence runs in absurd contradictions. Observe the present case, in which you are so good as to interest yourself. We have it from the Russian police that Amaroff is their man, and that in their opinion— they being well qualified to judge— he was murdered by Nihilists. We now learn that he was apparently on intimate terms with Nihilists, and we have good reason to believe that he was strangled in one of their clubs. What do you gather from that?"

"They discovered his treachery, and took an excusable revenge," said I.

"A sound conclusion. And now let us suppose that Amaroff was not a police spy at all; being, in fact, a dangerous Nihilist. What then?"

"Why set yourself such a puzzle?"

"Not for amusement," he said, with his quiet smile. "And now I propose a little experiment. You must introduce us to this club, Jackson; the door-keeper will know you, and pass us in. Afterwards you will go to the back entrance in the yard you spoke of, and wait. It should be easy to conceal yourself."

"Yes, sir. Am I to stop Greatman if he comes out?"

"No. Stop nobody. We had better be going."

The square lay desolate and lonely in the bleak moonlight. We crossed it, and stopped at a house in the shadows of the farther side. At our knock a slide flew back, and, in the gush of light, a hairy face examined us curiously.

"Vat is et?" he said.

The serjeant stepped forward and whispered. The man was sufficiently satisfied, for he dropped the slide at once, and the door swung back to admit us; the hairy-faced porter bowing a welcome in polite submission. The inspector led the way up the stairs, and I followed at his heels. The serjeant had disappeared.

It was a broad, low room in which we found ourselves, the rafters of the roof unhidden by the plaster of a ceiling. Round the walls on benches ranged behind tables a dozen men sat smoking and drinking. The chatter of talk faded away as we entered. In silence they stared at us, calmly, judiciously, without fear or curiosity. I could not have imagined a more composed and resolute company. I felt that I carried myself awkwardly, as an impertinent intruder should; but the inspector sauntered across the room to a bar on the further side as calmly as if he were the oldest and most valued member in the club.

A pale-faced man with a stained and yellow beard rose from his seat behind the glasses. His eyes were fixed on Peace with, a weak, pathetic expression like a dog in pain.

"Good evening, Mr. Greatman," said the inspector, "Can I have a word with you?"

"Yes, sir, if you will kindly step into my private room," he answered in excellent English, opening a hatch in the bar. "This is the way, sir, if you will follow me."

We walked after him down a short passage and stopped before the darkness of an open door. A spurt of a match and the gas jet flared upon a bare chamber, hung with a gaudy paper and furnished with half a dozen wooden chairs set round a deal table in the centre. In place of a carpet, our feet grated upon a smooth sprinkling of that grey sand which may still be found in old-fashioned inns. It was here then, if the detectives were not mistaken, that this crime had found a climax, this sordid murder not thirty hours old.

"If you would like a fire, gentlemen," suggested Greatman, "I can easily fetch 'some coals."

"Pray do not trouble yourself," said the inspector, politely. "My name is Peace, of the Criminal Investigation Department, and I called to inquire if you can tell me anything concerning the murder of the sculptor, Amaroff."

"I know nothing."

"That is strange, seeing that he was strangled in this very room."

"Here?" cried the Pole, with a stare of unbelief changing into sudden terror. "Here— in my room."

"So I believe," said Peace.

The man swayed for an instant, grasping at the back of a chair, and then dropped to the ground, moaning, his face covered with his hands. In that crouching figure before us was written the extremity of despair.

"Come, come, Greatman, pull yourself together," said the inspector, tapping him kindly on the shoulder. "If you are innocent, there is no need to make all this fuss."

"It was Nicolin who lied to me," he cried, looking up with bewildered eyes.

"Very probably," said Peace, "it is a habit with him."

"Yet it was I, miserable that I am, who made the meeting between them. Before Heaven, it was with the innocence of a child. If those my comrades of the club but knew—"

He hesitated, his eyes searching the room in sudden terror.

"Oblige me by seeing that we have no comrades already at the keyhole, Mr. Phillips," said Peace.

There was no one at the door; no one in the dark passage; and when I returned I found that Peace had lifted the caretaker to a chair, where he sat in a crumpled heap.

"You can trust us," the detective was saying. "Believe me, Greatman, it will be best for yourself that you hide nothing."

And so with many fierce cries and protestations, this poor creature began his story.

It was Nicolin, it seemed, who had discovered that Greatman, the caretaker of the Brutus Club, was one and the same with the forger, Ivan Kroll, of Odessa, who had been wanted by the Russian police for close upon twelve years. But having a shrewd head on his shoulders, Nicolin made no immediate use of his knowledge. For forgery a man might be extradited from England. Once in Russia the charge would be altered to nihilism, and then— Siberia. It was not pleasant for the caretaker of a nihilist club to be at the mercy of a black-bearded spy lounging on the step outside. "It was that which drove me to the brandy;" said poor Greatman, alias Kroll.

About the end of August there began, he continued, a duel of wits between the two men, Amaroff and Nicolin, the reasons and causes of which did not, if he might be permitted to say, concern us. Nicolin's career was dependent on his success. For him, failure spelt permanent disgrace. Yet it was Amaroff who was playing with his opponent as a cat with a mouse, confusing and surprising him at every turn, driving him, indeed, when time grew pressing, into desperate measures. At the last he formed a plan, did Nicolin, a scheme worthy of his most cunning brain.

"This, then, he did," ended the poor caretaker. "He came to me— I who had so great love and honour for Amaroff, my friend, I whom he had turned from crime and aided to earn a wage in honesty— he came to me and he says: 'Kroll, in my pocket is a warrant that will send you back to the snow places in the East; do you fear me, my good Kroll?' And I feared him. 'See, now,' he said, 'we desire to see your friend Amaroff for a little talk. We cannot harm him here in this mad country. Contrive a trick, bring him into your private room behind the bar. Give us the key of the yard door that we may come secretly to him— and afterwards you will hear no more of Siberia from me. Do you consent?'

"Gentlemen, I believed him, also having fear of the snow places; and I consented.

"So Amaroff answered my call, and with some excuse I left him in this room. It was at a time when few members were in the club— about seven of the clock. And that, as I live, is all I have to tell. I waited at my seat behind the bar. I saw nothing, heard nothing— and at last when I went to my room, behold it was empty! I tried to suspect no wrong— but I did not sleep that night. In the morning I saw in the papers that Amaroff, my friend, was dead, and how he died I could not tell."

"So Nicolin won the game," suggested Peace, softly. "And there will be no regrettable incident when the Czar enters Paris the day after to-morrow."

"Of that I have no knowledge," said Greatman; but I saw a sudden resolution shine in his face that seemed to put new heart into the man.

"Well, Mr. Phillips," said the inspector, turning upon me with a warning quiver of the left eyelid, "it is time we were on the move. If we are to meet Nicolin at the studio by seven to-morrow morning, we must get to bed early."

"Certainly," I said. I was rather out of my depth, but I take myself this credit that I did not show it.

"Then do you search the studio to-morrow?" asked Greatman.

"Yes— it has been arranged."

"But will you not first arrest this Nicolin, this murderer?"

"My dear Mr. Greatman," said the inspector, "you have told us your story, and I thank you for your confidence. But I advise you now to leave things alone. I will see justice done— don't be afraid about that. For the rest, please to keep a silent tongue in your head— it will be safer. There is still Siberia for Ivan Kroll just as there may be dangers from your friends in the club yonder for Julius Greatman, who arranged so indiscreet a meeting in his private room. Good night to you."

The caretaker did not reply, but opening the door, bowed us into the passage that led to the big room. We had not taken half a dozen steps when I looked back over my shoulder, expecting to see him behind us. But he had vanished.

"He's gone," I whispered, gripping my companion by the arm.

"I know, I know. Keep quiet."

As we stood there listening, I heard the sudden clatter of boots upon a stairway, and then silence.

"It appears to me that we shall have an interesting evening," said Addington Peace.

A twist in the passage, a turn through a door, and we were rattling down the back stairs and out into a moonlit yard. In the denser darkness under the walls I made out a double row of big barrows, from which there came a subtle aroma in which stale fish predominated. From amongst them a tall shadow arose and came slipping to our side.

"He's off, sir," said the serjeant, for it was he. "Rushed by, shaking his fist and talking to himself like a madman. Where has he gone, do you think?"

"To Amaroff's studio; and we must get there before him. The nearest cab-rank, if you please, Jackson."

We ran through the yard, hustled up the narrow streets, lost ourselves, as far as I was concerned, in a maze of alleys, and finally shot out into a roaring thoroughfare, crowded with a strolling population. No cab was in sight. Opposite the lamps of the underground station the inspector stopped us.

"It would be quicker," he said, with a jerk of the head, and we turned into the booking-office and galloped down the stairs. Luck was with us, and we tumbled into a carriage as the train moved away.

We were not alone, and we journeyed in silence. Station after station slipped by, until at last we were in the south-western district again. My excitement increased as we fled up the stairs of the South Kensington station. Here was a new sensation, keen, virile, natural; here was a race worth the trouble it involved. I did not understand; but I knew that on our speed much depended. Indeed, I could have shouted aloud, but for the influence of those two quiet, unemotional figures that trotted on either hand.

I regretted nothing— an hour of this was worth a year of artistic contemplation.

At the corner we found a hansom, and soon were rattling down the King's Road. When the cab stopped, to the inspector's order, it was not, as I expected, at the corner of Harden Place, but a street preceding it. Down this we walked quickly until we came upon a seedy-looking fellow with a red muffler about his neck, leaning against the wall.

I was surprised when we halted in front of him.

"Good evening, Harrison," said the inspector. "Anything to report?"

"They're there, sir. They came about ten minutes ago. Job and Turner are watching the door in Harden Place, and I came here."

"They didn't see any of you?"

"No, sir, I am sure of it."

"You had better join the others in Harden Place. Keep within hearing, and if I whistle, kick in the side door of the studio— it can be done. There is a man who I fancy will have a key to the door that is due in about five minutes. If I have not whistled before he arrives, let him through. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective faded discreetly into the darkness, while the inspector turned to me.

"There may be complications, Mr. Phillips, and no slight danger. I must ask you to go home."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Mutiny," he said; but I could see that he was smiling. "You are rather a fraud, Mr. Phillips— rather a fraud, you know. There is more of a fighter than a dilettante in you, after all. Come, then— over you go."

A jump, a scramble, and all three of us were over the wall, dropping into a ragged shrubbery of laurel. We groped and stumbled our way through the growth of bushes until we emerged on a grass plot. Then I understood. We were at the back of Amaroff's studio. On the side where we stood was the out-house, its sloping roof reaching up to the long windows under the eaves— the upper lights, as sculptors call them. And even as I looked there came through these windows a flicker of light, an eye that winked in the darkness and was gone.

We crept softly forward until we reached the shadow of the out-house. It was roofed with rough tiles, which came to within seven feet of the ground. Fortunately, they did not project out from the wall of the building.

"You must help us up, Jackson," Peace whispered, "and then go round to the door, which I see at the back there. If they make a bolt that way, blow your whistle. If I whistle, start hammering on the door as if you were a dozen men. Now then, take me on your shoulders."

He scrambled to the roof like a cat. Lying flat, he thrust out a hand. A hoist from the sergeant, and I landed beside him. We waited a few moments, and then commenced to work our way up the roof. From its upper angle I found that the greater part of the interior of the studio was within our observation.

The moonlight that drifted through the opposing panes flooded the centre of the studio with soft light, in the midst of which the bust in bronze rose darkly upon its pedestal. A minute, and then the eye of light winked out, flickered, explored the pools of shadow, and finally steadied on the wall as three men moved from the room beneath us, following one by one. A second lantern came into play, and before our eyes commenced a search such as I could have hardly credited, so swift, methodical, and thorough were its methods. The cushions were probed with long pins, the cracks of the bare boards, and the nails that held them in position, were studied each in turn, the plastered walls were sounded inch by inch, the locks of desk and drawer were picked with the ease of mechanical knowledge.

We heard it before the men below, the faint patter, patter on the road outside of a runner in desperate haste. The footsteps grew silent, and in the pause there must have come a sound, audible to them though not to us, for the lantern slides shut down like the snapping of teeth, and the men vanished into the gloom. Only the moonlight remained, bathing the Nero in its gentle beams. I glanced at Peace. His expression was one of beatific enjoyment, but his whistle was at his lips.

I could not see the entrance door, so that the struggle was well-nigh over before I knew it was begun. The stranger fought hard, as I judged from the scuffling thuds, yet he raised no cry for help. Then the eyes of the lanterns glowed again, and they led him into the centre of the studio with the glint of steel marking the handcuffs on his wrists. It was Greatman— the fox that had run into the den of the wolves!

"And so, mon ami, you play a double game."

It was not until he spoke that I realized that I could hear what went forward within. The big ventilators above me were open, and Nicolin— for it was he— did not modulate his voice.

"It is you that killed him," cried the prisoner, raising his fettered hands. "You that have betrayed me. Murderer and liar that you are."

His frail body shook to the fury that was on him; but the Russian laughed in his black beard, stroking it with his hands.

"I had almost forgotten," he said. "It may be that you have some cause of complaint against me. But now that you are here, you will doubtless be kind enough to save us trouble. Where, my good Kroll, are the bombs hidden?"

"Do you think I shall tell you?"

"Remember, Amaroff is dead. They will not go to Paris now. Do not be foolish. Show me the hiding-place, and no harm shall come to you."

"No."

"Then you will return to Russia. The Odessa forgery will carry you there by English law— but, remember, it is for something more than forgery that you will have to answer when you arrive."

There was a silence, and then Nicolin spoke again— two words.

"Sagalien Island."

"I shall not go there," said the prisoner, simply. "I shall not go there— Nicolin the spy, Nicolin the murderer and liar!"

"Then you will achieve a miracle. For, as the Czar rules, before a week is out you will be on the sea, and within a month— stop him, stop him!"

He had sprung from them with a bound like that of a wild beast, and with his fettered hands had gripped the shaft of the bust of Nero, swinging it high above his head. For a part of a second, as a film might seize the photograph, I saw him stand in the moonlight with that cruel face in bronze rocking above his own white face in flesh and blood below; yet, as I remember it, there was neither fear nor anger in his expression. And then, as it were, the shutter clicked, for Peace dealt me so violent a blow that it sent me rolling down the roof into the darkness. And as I tumbled headlong from the edge, the whole air seemed to burst into fragments about me— a mighty concussion that left me, deafened, shaken, bewildered, amongst the broken tiles and falling fragments on the ground below.

I WAS IN my most comfortable chair, with old Jacob washing the cut on my head, and the inspector's nimble fingers twisting a bandage before I quite realized that I had escaped that great explosion. Vaguely, as in a dream, I remembered that two men, presumably Peace and the sergeant, had dragged me to my feet, had knotted a handkerchief round my head, had pushed me over the wall, and finally lifted me into a passing cab— all with a mad haste as if it were we who had been the criminals. Anyhow, I was at home, which was of the first importance to me at the moment.

"What blew up, inspector?" I asked faintly.

"The dynamite hidden in the bust— but don't ask questions."

"Oh, I'm all right," I told him. "Do explain things."

"I'll call to-morrow, and—"

"No, tell me now, or I shall not sleep a wink."

He looked at me a moment, with his head cocked on one side after his quaint fashion.

"Very well," he said at last. "I'll talk, if you'll promise to keep quiet."

I promised, and he began.

"It's quite a simple story. Nicolín had got word that an attempt was to be made on the Czar, who is due in Paris the day after to-morrow, and that Amaroff was engineering the whole affair; also the Russian was making no headway, and he knew that his position was at stake if he failed. So he got desperate, and took the game into his own hands. He forced Greatman to fix a rendezvous, brought up his men, and strangled Amaroff in the sanded parlour. It was a smart thing to do, for no one was likely to suspect them, especially as he gave out that Amaroff was one of his own officers."

"But how did you locate the place where the murder occurred?" I asked him feebly.

"It was raining last night— do you remember?"

"Yes."

"When I first arrived at the mortuary, I went over Amaroff's clothing. On the soles of his boots was a patch of dry sand. Therefore he could not have walked through the wet streets to the spot where he was found. Also the sand must have been on the floor where he last stood. On the back of his coat was a slimy smeer mixed with the scales of mackerel. If my first proposition was correct, he must have been carried from the place with the sanded floor; and the suggestion was that a fish-barrow had been used, a fish-barrow such as you may see the London costers pushing before them in their street sales. It was not likely that the men implicated would have risked carrying him further than was necessary. That limited the radius of the search. Indeed, we located the club in under three hours."

"Of course it seems quite easy," I told him. "But when did you first suspect that Nicolín was lying?"

"His search of the studio was simply a blind," he said. "I soon caught on to that. Also in Amaroff's little bedroom stood his luggage ready packed. He was just off on a journey— that was plain. Nicolín had said nothing about a journey, which was in itself suspicious. I knew the Russian was not the bungler he pretended to be, and I admit that I was puzzled. Then you came along and told me of the business with the key. It was plain they were coming back— but why? It was to discover it that I left three men to watch the studio while I kept my appointment with Jackson in Maiden Square. From what I learnt from him it was evident that Greatman was a man who knew something; so I tried a bluff on him. It's quite simple, isn't it?"

"Oh yes," I said; "but how did you know Greatman was going to the studio when he ran away?"

"Rather an unnecessary question, Mr. Phillips, isn't it? Consider a minute. Amaroff was a Nihilist; he was playing a big game— which means dynamite with folks of their persuasion. He had been knocked out of the running, but the dynamite remained. And where? In the studio where Nicolin was returning to search for it; where Greatman also would go to recover it if he desired to revenge himself on Nicolin by carrying out his friend's plot himself. Mark you, I do not believe that originally he had any active part in carrying out this assassination. But when he heard how Nicolin had fooled him, he was anxious to get square by risking all and smuggling the bombs to Paris himself. Moreover, Mr. Phillips, I wanted to locate that dynamite. It is not well to have bombs floating about London, ready to the hand of well-bred lunatics. They breed international squabbles in which we, the police, get jumped upon."

"And they were hidden in the bust?"

"A very good place too. With careful packing, they would have got to Paris safe enough. The Nero was a known work of art. No one would have suspected it for a moment. Of course I had no idea that the dynamite was stored in the bronze till Greatman grabbed it, and I saw his face. Then I punched you in the chest and rolled after you myself."

"You saved my life anyway," I said gratefully.

"Tut, tut, Mr. Phillips, that's nothing. Another day you may do the same for me."

"If I get a chance," I told him. "But what will be done now?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I dragged you off to be away before the crowd arrived. There was no point in your being found in the neighbourhood and asked questions at the inquest on what remains of their bodies. I shall report to Scotland Yard, and Scotland Yard will talk to the Foreign Office, and the Foreign Office will make polite representations to St. Petersburg, and everything will be hushed up. After all, there's nobody left to punish and nobody to pity, barring Greatman, who had the makings of a man in him. Amaroff was a romantic murderer, and Nicolin a practical one; but neither of them were at all the sort of people to encourage. So I should advise you to keep quiet, Mr. Phillips, and not talk of your adventure. Do you agree?"

"Certainly," I said; and we shook hands on it.

9: Dregs

Sumner Locke

1881-1917

Punch (Melbourne), 2 Dec 1913

"SQUARE" SHANNON had a corner of the Queensland back-blocks that took a man a week to ride round. It stretched like a ripple of sun-browned paper under skies of vivid blue, and on the face of it a thousand head of cattle wandered—wandered, searching out life among the dead timber just as "Square" himself had done in previous years among the charred souls of a dry-hearted humanity. He had touched on many countries since he had left London, but had found nothing to equal the perfect peace of the Queensland blocks way out.

Here he had stayed a number of years lost to the things of his former career, and making fresh life out of a day and a night in the sobriety of the bush and the eternal quietness of an army of gum-trees and dumb brutes of bullocks.

But a sudden jar on his mental atmosphere found him one evening concerned even beyond the consternation of "Blood," the Chinese cook.

Early that day the black drover from the run further south had stopped business for an hour or so to hand "Square" a letter. It concerned Macdonald Webb, owner of the run from which the drover had come, and it also concerned a woman—the only white woman within ninety miles.

This was as the slamming of an iron door upon the sensitive silences now reigning in Shannon's heart. Since receiving the note he had taken no food, and the Chinese housekeeper had enough superlative enthusiasm about his methods of conducting a dinner to make him go down like a pricked bladder when no notice was taken of it.

"You no eatem big rooster me cook him dinnear; you no eatem anything welly bad tea— um?"

This came to Shannon as he tried to reason things in the cool of the verandah. His long, tired limbs were stretched on a warped cane lounge, and every time anyone spoke to him he moved heavily, and the cane lounge creaked miserably under him. He arrested the movements of "Blood" the Chinaman before he could step further out to the verandah.

"Go to — pieces," he said brutally, minded only of his own affairs.

"Welly good— poor Chinaman me gettem paper you write Boss Webb, and then you eatem big rooster— um?"

Shannon met the almond orbs of the Chow, and then laughed outright. "I believe you understand, with a Celestial sort of clairvoyance, 'Blood,' that there is trouble about, eh? Boss Webb has a missus with him— he's brought out his wife from England— long way to bring a woman, eh? She's Missus Webb."

The Chow looked frightened. He understood enough to know that this was an event if it was nothing more or less. He knew also that "Missus Webb" was the only white woman within ninety miles; and, though the Webbs were living fully twenty-five miles to the south, the thought of it very nearly scared him—white.

"Welly bad— beesuness," he said, looking at "Square."

"Rotten," said Shannon, and took out his pipe. "Look here, 'Blood'— I believe I'm as timid as you are only I've got a reason— a very big reason."

"Welly had sings comes along," interrupted "Blood," and then said "Um?" in his queer way of expecting an answer.

But Shannon never answered, nor did he offer to get off the chair and come into his tea. The Chinaman took his shuffling self to the rear of the habitation, and started an argument with a nigger boy whom he had severe contempt. This left "Square" to his thoughts and the night.

He was still dominating his soul with strong stimulants of harboured grievances when Webb himself threw rein near the verandah.

"Hullo, Shannon— you got my letter?"

"Square" sat up slowly.

"We are still under the narcotic influence of it," said Shannon. Behind his merry eyes there lay a steeped purpose of his own, and that purpose, though outwardly garbed in a veneer of buffoonery, was like iron, unrelenting and ready for the fire.

"She came out a week ago, and it's made a difference already," said Webb.

"I expect so," answered "Square."

"I told you long ago, Mac, that women make a devil of a difference. Perhaps you're finding it out, but don't blame me. I talk from experience."

Webb sat down on the edge of the verandah.

"Wrong again," he smiled. "I mean it has made a heavenly difference. Why, the place looks twenty times as good and thriving. Women are so optimistic even in places like this. The cook has stayed, the boys all look clean. We have tablecloths for meals, and the cattle come home to roost, as it were. There is positively nothing wrong, but that I must put in a manager. You see, I must give time to her. It's fully seven years since I came out, and I've got to make that up to her, you know. Well, I must have a dependable hand to lean on, and I'm off now to see if I can get a man with a decent head in Brisbane or Sydney. You'll look after her, 'Square'?"

A steel point rose in both of Shannon's eyes. He took things very mildly.

"That is what you said in your letter, and I've been backing myself from it ever since. Look here, Webb, I'm no good at taking care of a woman— I told you that years ago. Once I sampled one in the good old days at home. Oh, Lord, it was like bubbling wine on a hot night, but between times it was— was something like an overdose of the same wine. I had a resultant headache that perpetually stayed— a

thing to give a man brain fever when she was out of his sight, and too much life when she was anywhere near. Oh, I suppose I could have made good with her, but somehow I thought that I was to blame, and so I slipped a cog— got out of gear— had to leave in a hurry and give her a chance. I've been giving her a chance ever since."

The evening was stretching itself out in deep shadows over the land, and away in the hills a curlew allowed a long-drawn note to travel plaintively into the silence. Webb looked at his friend.

"I know your life, 'Square,' but because you've turned through one gate it's no reason why you should stay in the first paddock. You've got to go further some day, and why not start by getting into harness now. It isn't as if you were old— you're possibly thirty-eight."

"Forty," answered Shannon, "and the trouble went over twenty years ago. Since then I've never spoken to a woman when I could get out of it. I suppose I built a world on the one little girl, and it wasn't big enough for us— at least it wasn't big enough for three of us, and that was what she apparently needed." His eyes had gone to the red rim of a smouldering fire, and Webb quietly touched upon the subject with reserve.

"You told me when we met seven years ago, 'Square'—you told me you chucked in your chance."

"I chucked in my whole life," said "Square," almost shouting with the fever behind his eyes. "I tossed in every chip I held— I threw away mother, family, my name and my bank account— just so that she might be happy. Yes, I cut clean away, tore out the complete volume of pages, wiped my name off the traditional slate, and went abroad. Good Lord, you know the rest. I've been happy working among the shrivelled souls of men."

Webb had taken off his hat to cool his face. Things were getting deeper than he had ever intended, and he remained silent, letting his friend speak his limit. Shannon creaked twice on the lounge, and then sprang to his feet.

"You want me to take it up again— to talk to a woman as if I liked her. Well, I don't like her. I suppose I love her. I mean I love all women. I can't see that they were ever made to be anything but butterflies of chance. Men are like swarming gnats buzzing through a splash of sunshine, and taking up most of the substance of life there. Yes, I love women because they are so inconsiderately inconsistent to themselves. Like the butterflies— they tumble into trouble on purpose. They chase the gnats, too, maybe. Stupid little creatures— they think life is a pretty bubble, and they break right through it. I tell you I love all women, so I keep away, and I'm bruised— bruised because of that, perhaps."

Webb smoked lazily. "If you could only come down quarter way to reason," he said quietly. "You're bound to take up with soft situations some time or other in your life again, and then where are you?— the woman must come in."

"Hardly," said "Square." "Don't you see, I've cut it out— twisted my heart so that it does not bother me. I shan't run across women unless I'm led foolishly in the dark. You're leading me now— you want me to go down to your run, and stop there, putting in time talking things— things, good Lord, man, that have worn off my tongue. I'd be rude first go, and she'd possibly cry, then I'd kiss her— nice things, eh?"

Webb roared outright. "Old man, I'm the most likely person to ask you to kiss her! She's good to kiss, though she's near forty years old herself. I'd like you to kiss her, because you're good all through. She'd wear the caress as a honour, same as the roan who receives the V.C. Come, there's no reason for you not to meet her."

Shannon stood blocked. He had no way but to surrender.

"Webb," he said, more reasonably. "Once I did a foolish thing. I went away from her and I *died*."

There was a suffocating silence, and the night dinned into the hollows between the hills.

"You didn't know, that, did you? I died— perhaps to save her."

"You mean you buried yourself apart from the things you had been used to— took up another name, and—"

"Partly, but I honestly died. You understand ? Went to Buenos Ayres when there was trouble, got mixed up on purpose, hurt— killed— buried— my pocket wallet and my last words sent home. Oh, it isn't a joke—it's real."

He advanced closely upon Webb. "That gave her a chance, you know. She cared for someone else, and she was such a kid— seventeen— and me a boy of nineteen. We hadn't been married a year when I saw her trouble, and the poor little butterfly was singeing her wings trying to keep things from me. Well, I could not bear her to suffer. The other chap was a good lad, though incompetent. Money was his disease, and so I knew she'd be all right. Now, after having to go through that lie, and pull myself out as another man— take up my swag and hump out as— well, as "Shannon"— is it likely I want to touch society again?"

"I'm sorry," said Webb. "I did not understand."

"And any woman to me, even your wife, would be a raking together of the smouldering fire. I loved that butterfly. That's why I left."

"And, did she marry the other chap ?"

"God knows," was all Shannon answered.

Webb got up from the verandah. "I— I made a mistake when I asked you, "Square," but, you see, I didn't understand you still felt the sore. I'll fix things up differently. Good night."

Shannon watched the glory of the night settling down like a power that could not be displaced. When he heard the creaking of the leather saddle under Webb he shook back his head and shouted after him:

"Mac, I'm a bloated fool, and I'm not fit to be counted a man at all. Get to the town, and I'll cross over to-morrow and see what I can do for, for—"

Webb rounded the dusty track, and came back to the house. "I would not ask you, old man. It's not in our line, I can see."

Shannon laughed roughly.

"Everything to do with helping a woman is in my line, Webb. You've brought me to my senses, and you've given me the taste of things again. Tell Mrs. Webb I'm just a bush-scored hermit, but I think I know enough to keep her from being frightened while you go down."

"She's so unused to the bush," said Webb.

"I'll remember that," said Shannon, and went into the house.

Slowly along the bridal track rode Shannon, and approached Webb's run.

A black woman— a shrieking blotch on the land— escaped from the sheds and ran into the house. "Square" Shannon knew that he had put his foot through the mazes of twenty years, and had back-stepped right on to the chaos of things as they had been, then immediately he walked into the presence of Mrs. Webb.

Just for a moment it seemed as if somebody had thrown a phantasy of coloured lights over him, and that they had broken and scattered upon his cold nerves a series of red-hot electric shocks that almost doubled up his proper senses. He looked across at the woman sitting there in the cretonne-covered chair, and watched her crumple her fingers among the folds of her dress. He knew that she was talking, and that she was wonderfully calm, but he thought that she would shriek in a minute. He felt that women were not through the worst of a matter unless there had been a few hysterical outbursts as a let-off.

But Mrs. Webb was marvellously intense and fitfully restrained.

"I knew last night," she was saying. "Don told me something of your story."

She spoke in syncopated sentences, and Shannon blocked himself against the door to keep the thing private from the black house-girl, whose attention prompted her to open doors suddenly occasionally, with prehistoric femininity.

"I was prepared to distrust even my own faith in you which I have held all these years. My mother said you'd turn up some day; but I felt the letter your friend sent me was true, and I didn't credit you with such subterfuge. I married Don Webb two years afterwards."

Shannon's breath was choking him with the furious racing of his heart. He had never believed that such a situation could have risen out of an action buried twenty years ago, thousands of miles from the peace of the great cattle country.

"I meant you to marry," he said, hearing his own voice somewhere at the back of his head. "I thought it would be— the boy—"

Mrs. Webb looked white and disgusted.

"Mere childish fun," she said hurriedly. "I suppose I cared for you, and tried to do as well as I could. You took flight on a scare because I was an incompetent girl. When you had passed out I grew up suddenly. I met Donald, and—"

"Lived happily ever after, till—"

"Square's" eyes were like the steel of a piston-rod— rising and falling with swift movements of white heat.

"I love him!" Mrs. Webb fell back in her chair, and took time to tell the rest.

Shannon still backed against the door. His great body was shaking, but he knew the strength of what he had to do.

"I never foresaw any muddle— and I like Webb," he said quietly. "This is one of the cursed ghosts of my death-lie. I suppose it will rise up against me till I cram it down solid alongside of my own carcase— presently."

Mrs. Webb took hold again.

"There are more lives dragged into this than you know, and there are going to be lives follow that will bear the stigma of your action visited down to them by an unholy law. Donald and I had a child— a son— and there is property. You see the danger now?"

Shannon folded his arms across his chest. This gave him a steadier grip of himself.

"Property that is entailed," she went on, "and comes down in the direct line."

Shannon wet his burning lips. "In the direct line! Good God!" was all he said.

"That vein of things will go on now to generations through this double action of ours," said Mrs. Webb.

"Of *mine*," said Shannon, still holding back to the door. "The boy is at home with my people, being educated for a gentleman. Didn't you know that Don came out here to make good, and pull up things there so as to give our son a chance? Presently we will go back again, and the old home will be reinstated, and my boy will succeed in time. Oh, Steven, you have snapped his birthright."

"Square's" eyes were softer now, and he could not answer.

"The lie will hunt us down all our lives," said Mrs. Webb.

But Shannon took four steps to her side, and became stronger as he took her hand.

"It's just this," he said, rummaging in his brain-box for sufficient reason to help him say the right things that would help her immediately. "Things have got a little crowded. I thought that the world was larger, and it seems to have shrunk in the last hour as if it had been bleached of all its blood. We're back where we started, butterfly, and there is hardly room for one of us to move a foot without treading on the other. Now, look here, you must rely on me in this—"

"You can never make the situation even a living one," said the woman, remaining very still, with her hand crushed into his.

"It need not be a living one," said Shannon. "Little woman, pretence seems like a worm that one tries to bury— it wriggles underground for time, but it must come up again. There is only one thing to do."

"What is that?" Her eyes hastened to meet his. and her reliance had started at that point.

"*Kill* the worm— right out."

Mrs. Webb did not shriek, and Shannon knew she had no intention of doing so. Her quiet settled into his heart and suffocated him there instead.

"I can't think about that," she said, queerly cold. "I can only wonder and wonder and pity —Don. He has set his heart on the boy and on his chance to pull up things from here."

"You do not wish to keep this thing from him?"

"Square" put the query mildly; he knew the answer. Her eyes were truth.

"I don't know when it will be advisable to tell him. I think when things start—"

"When the time is ripe," said Shannon. "When the first bud begins to fall."

Donald Webb returned four days afterwards, and brought a fresh man with him. He started into the business of the "run" right away.

" 'Square,' don't think of running back just for a day or so if you can spare the time. I've got a man coming in to look at a mob of young bullocks, and the drovers can come in and take charge from to-night. I shall want you to play guardian a little longer to my wife, seeing that you seem to have made such a charming friendship after all."

Shannon looked tired about the eyes, and said something about having to get back to his place during the next twenty-four hours.

"That's all right, old man," Webb broke in. "Just give me a hand out at the camp by bringing Mrs. Webb along. She's awfully keen on seeing a 'muster,' and it's her first show round."

"Don't you want me to help you 'cutting-out' or anything?" said Shannon, with manly reservation on his resources.

"I want you to make things good for her," said Webb, handling his friend in a brotherly way, and looking with deep meaning right into the other man's eyes.

So it turned out that "Square" Shannon held himself in durance for a little while longer. To him it was the greatest pleasure in his life to be able to do anything for either of them.

When Webb had left for the camp some miles through the scrub, where cattle from the north and the -south and other boundaries were usually driven in by the men to be "branded," and "sorted," and got ready for the roads, "Square" and the woman rode together.

Shannon talked at random, never giving her a chance to refer to the dreadful calamity facing them so directly.

"Ever notice in these parts," he said, "that a little bush flower comes up in one place and just dies there? Next year it comes up somewhere else— reincarnated in all its beauty. Well, isn't it the same with people?"

Mrs. Webb sat silent on her saddle. She never could commence the subject near to her heart and soul without trying to make it as easy as she could for the man.

"Then, again," said Shannon, riding hot to the saddle, "fifty little blooming plants cuddle all down into one blessed crevice between a granite rock and a break-wind bush. There they hug life till they can't hold it any longer— eh? Further on they blow apart, and one nods and bends and tosses all care to the wind, and lasts a bit longer even on the penetrating life sapping sunlight. I don't suppose you can count life that way?"

Mrs. Webb skirted a track that ran wild with soldier ants. She was of a mood to hurt nothing, and the voice of the man made her sad indeed. She guided her horse where the cruel hoofs could not tread out the smaller creatures of the bush.

"I don't know," went on Shannon. "Sometimes you'll see a bird— flying low— and—"

"Listen!" Mrs. Webb caught at his shoulder as they rode abreast.

"You're scared of bush sounds," said Shannon.

"I don't like that rumble," answered the woman.

"You're like the little bush flowers. Shall we get behind a granite rock or a wind-blown bush? Would you like to crowd down among the flannel flowers and the wild orchids?"

Mrs. Webb, still holding his shoulder, turned her eyes slowly. She thought that he was strange. He had seemed so strong and so kind all along, but now he was inclined to ridicule.

"Listen!" she said again.

"We're on a dangerous track— didn't you know that?" said Shannon, letting a smile linger near his lips. Mrs. Webb took sudden fright, and let go her hold on him.

"Get me out of this, Steven," she said. "The bush is weird."

"It's only the cattle," said "Square." He stopped his horse, as she had drawn rein. "You're more alarmed than when you— you first came a week ago I should say. You never looked like that when you told me about things."

Suddenly his face went pallid and he looked grayed and sick.

"Good God— women are strange. Why didn't you shriek and grow afraid the other day when you found that I was alive? Now we're on a dangerous track, and you don't like it."

His eyes had become large with peculiar tenderness, and yet a cruel carelessness was in his voice.

"Are we going to be killed?" said the woman, who could not understand this hermit and the ways of the open bush.

"There may be a mercy like that about," said "Square." "I picked you once, butterfly, to spend a whole lifetime with me. I didn't want to share even that little bit of a few months with that fool-chap you used to let wander round you like a cursed spaniel. I used to dream we would live a time— just long enough to drink the beautiful wine of life, but not beyond that. I didn't want to stay to sop up the dregs that we had spilled ruthlessly for fun. I thought it would be all in the scheme of things that the God of happy hearts would pull us out and let us depart together at some early age— perhaps at about forty-five, or before that."

The cunning of his voice made the woman tremble as she looked at him. She felt that something had gone wrong with this man. He was oddly strange, and he had thrown away his hat, and the sun of the morning was fearfully strong upon his sweating face.

"We're forty and near to forty now," he said, and moved his horse a bit nearer as the sound of the cattle grew louder in his ears.

"I don't want to die," Mrs. Webb began like a child.

"It's not nice, but it's— quiet," said Shannon, and rubbed his sleeve over his head. "I told you about the flowers just now. Well, I've often thought that two, growing apart, may last a little longer."

The noise of the stampede was heavy on the wind now, and the whole earth trembled and rocked till Mrs. Webb nearly lost her mental balance.

"That's the cattle, you know, coming into the yards— 'scrubbers,' or wild beasts without reason like— like some of the sons of men who think to dodge trouble by running away from it. I can't tell yet which way they go, but these horses won't stand much longer."

Indeed, Mrs. Webb's horse had started to prick back its ears long ago, and several times it had taken a wild fancy to turn and return in one complete circle. Her hand, however, was strong on the curb.

"If you don't want to die," said Shannon, "better get off your horse. It's Bennett's mob from the north, and there is fear and death in every nostril of the brutes. God knows what will stop them—"

Even as he spoke he was tearing the half-stricken woman from her saddle. There was no time for more words, and he managed to throw her carefully behind a great fallen forest king that lay a bit towards the right of the open country. There was scarcely room to cover the two, but he protected the body of the woman with his own as if she had been a child tucked into his arms.

The vibrating earth around seemed to shake a thousand times, and everything quivered about them, though the woman crushed to her man of early years prayed in the suffocating warmth of the great beating pulse of the disturbed elements. Sickening sounds of hoof ripping through the ground and breaking wide

about their very ears made the man cling closer; and the tremendous upheaval of all things concentrated in one gigantic crash that rent the air and tore the natural senses from the two just for a short time as the bullocks raced overhead.

Shannon knew that the brutes were leaping over their hiding-place, and the clods of earth smarted his neck, bare to the war. One or two of the lumberous beasts sent the blood into his eyes with a stinging blindness that was darker than even the secrecy of the warm flesh of the woman's arms, into which he buried his reeling head. The brutes had struck him violently about the head and shoulders, and a well-planted hoof wrenched the last remnant of reason from him when it drove a weight that cut into his ankle and tore away the flesh and half the bone.

An eternity of splinters and broken mould of the ground rained for what seemed a thousand tormented hours, and then the dying echoes lulled and dropped behind the scrub, and the stampede was past, and a deathly piercing surge of silence enveloped Mrs. Webb, close hidden under the man's body.

She felt she must get out of the thing at once, but to move herself from the great weight of Shannon took her many degrees of time. She had to force back his body, that seemed to cling like a thing rivetted by a supernatural power to the whole of her life. She crawled out— stupefied.

The stampede had done her little harm, but it had left Shannon peacefully unconscious in death.

She crawled over and put the riding jacket she wore over his mutilated shoulders, and somewhere in the firmament she could hear him saying— kindly, soothingly, unresistingly: "I— didn't want— to stay to sop up the dregs. It's not nice... but it's... quiet."

10: Pigeons from Hell

Robert E. Howard

1906-1936

Weird Tales, May 1938

1: *The Whistler in the Dark*

GRISWELL AWOKE suddenly, every nerve tingling with a premonition of imminent peril. He stared about wildly, unable at first to remember where he was, or what he was doing there. Moonlight filtered in through the dusty windows, and the great empty room with its lofty ceiling and gaping black fireplace was spectral and unfamiliar. Then as he emerged from the clinging cobwebs of his recent sleep, he remembered where he was and how he came to be there. He twisted his head and stared at his companion, sleeping on the floor near him. John Branner was but a vaguely bulking shape in the darkness that the moon scarcely grayed.

Griswell tried to remember what had awakened him. There was no sound in the house, no sound outside except the mournful hoot of an owl, far away in the piny woods. Now he had captured the illusive memory. It was a dream, a nightmare so filled with dim terror that it had frightened him awake.

Recollection flooded back, vividly etching the abominable vision.

Or was it a dream? Certainly it must have been, but it had blended so curiously with recent actual events that it was difficult to know where reality left off and fantasy began.

Dreaming, he had seemed to relive his past few waking hours, in accurate detail. The dream had begun abruptly, as he and John Branner came in sight of the house where they now lay. They had come rattling and bouncing over the stumpy, uneven old road that led through the pine-lands, he and John Branner, wandering far afield from their New England home, in search of vacation, pleasure. They had sighted the old house with its balustraded galleries rising amidst a wilderness of weeds, and bushes, just as the sun was setting behind it. It dominated their fancy, rearing black and stark and gaunt against the low lurid rampart of sunset, barred by the black pines.

They were tired, sick of bumping and pounding all day over woodland roads. The old deserted house stimulated their imagination with its suggestion of ante-bellum splendor and ultimate decay. They left the automobile beside the rutty road, and as they went up the winding walk of crumbling bricks, almost lost in the tangle of rank growth, pigeons rose from the balustrades in a fluttering, feathery crowd and swept away with a low thunder of beating wings.

The oaken door sagged on broken hinges. Dust lay thick on the floor of the wide, dim hallway, on the broad steps of the stair that mounted up from the hall. They turned into a door opposite the landing, and entered a large room, empty,

dusty, with cobwebs shining thickly in the corners. Dust lay thick over the ashes in the great fireplace.

They discussed gathering wood and building a fire, but decided against it. As the sun sank, darkness came quickly, the thick, black, absolute darkness of the pinelands. They knew that rattlesnakes and copperheads haunted Southern forests, and they did not care to go groping for firewood in the dark. They ate frugally from tins, then rolled in their blankets fully clad before the empty fireplace, and went instantly to sleep.

This, in part, was what Griswell had dreamed. He saw again the gaunt house looming stark against the crimson sunset; saw the flight of the pigeons as he and Branner came up the shattered walk. He saw the dim room in which they presently lay, and he saw the two forms that were himself and his companion, lying wrapped in their blankets on the dusty floor. Then from that point, his dream altered subtly, passed out of the realm of the common-place and became tinged with fear. He was looking into a vague, shadowy chamber, lit by the gray light of the moon which streamed in from some obscure source. For there was no window in that room. But in the gray light he saw three silent shapes that hung suspended in a row, and their stillness and their outlines woke chill horror in his soul. There was no sound, no word, but he sensed a Presence of fear and lunacy crouching in a dark corner.... Abruptly, he was back in the dusty, high-ceilinged room, before the great fireplace.

HE WAS lying in his blankets, staring tensely through the dim door and across the shadowy hall, to where a beam of moonlight fell across the balustraded stair, some seven steps up from the landing. And there was something on the stair, a bent, misshapen, shadowy thing that never moved fully into the beam of light. But a dim yellow blur that might have been a face was turned toward him, as if something crouched on the stair, regarding him and his companion.

Fright crept chilly through his veins, and it was then that he awoke—if indeed he had been asleep.

He blinked his eyes. The beam of moonlight fell across the stair just as he had dreamed it did; but no figure lurked there. Yet his flesh still crawled from the fear the dream or vision had roused in him; his legs felt as if they had been plunged in ice-water.

He made an involuntary movement to awaken his companion, when a sudden sound paralyzed him.

It was the sound of whistling on the floor above. Eery and sweet it rose, not carrying any tune, but piping shrill and melodious. Such a sound in a supposedly deserted house was alarming enough; but it was more than the fear of a physical invader that held Griswell frozen. He could not himself have defined the horror that gripped him. But Branner's blankets rustled, and Griswell saw he was sitting

upright. His figure bulked dimly in the soft darkness, the head turned toward the stair as if the man were listening intently. More sweetly and more subtly evil rose that weird whistling.

"John!" whispered Griswell from dry lips. He had meant to shout—to tell Branner that there was somebody upstairs, somebody who could mean them no good; that they must leave the house at once. But his voice died dryly in his throat.

Branner had risen. His boots clumped on the floor as he moved toward the door. He stalked leisurely into the hall and made for the lower landing, merging with the shadows that clustered black about the stair.

Griswell lay incapable of movement, his mind a whirl of bewilderment. Who was that whistling upstairs? Why was Branner going up those stairs? Griswell saw him pass the spot where the moonlight rested, saw his head tilted back as if he were looking at something Griswell could not see, above and beyond the stair. But his face was like that of a sleepwalker. He moved across the bar of moonlight and vanished from Griswell's view, even as the latter tried to shout to him to come back. A ghastly whisper was the only result of his effort.

The whistling sank to a lower note, died out. Griswell heard the stairs creaking under Branner's measured tread. Now he had reached the hallway above, for Griswell heard the clump of his feet moving along it.

Suddenly the footfalls halted, and the whole night seemed to hold its breath. Then an awful scream split the stillness, and Griswell started up, echoing the cry.

The strange paralysis that had held him was broken. He took a step toward the door, then checked himself. The footfalls were resumed. Branner was coming back. He was not running. The tread was even more deliberate and measured than before. Now the stairs began to creak again. A groping hand, moving along the balustrade, came into the bar of moonlight; then another, and a ghastly thrill went through Griswell as he saw that the other hand gripped a hatchet—a hatchet which dripped blackly. *Was that Branner who was coming down that stair?*

Yes! The figure had moved into the bar of moonlight now, and Griswell recognized it.

Then he saw Branner's face, and a shriek burst from Griswell's lips. Branner's face was bloodless, corpselike; gouts of blood dripped darkly down it; his eyes were glassy and set, and blood oozed from the great gash *which cleft the crown of his head!*

GRISWELL never remembered exactly how he got out of that accursed house. Afterward he retained a mad, confused impression of smashing his way through a dusty cobwebbed window, of stumbling blindly across the weed-choked lawn, gibbering his frantic horror. He saw the black wall of the pines, and the moon floating in a blood-red mist in which there was neither sanity nor reason.

Some shred of sanity returned to him as he saw the automobile beside the road. In a world gone suddenly mad, that was an object reflecting prosaic reality; but even as he reacted for the door, a dry chilling whirl sounded in his ears, and he recoiled from the swaying undulating shape that arched up from its scaly coils on the driver's seat and hissed sibilantly at him, darting a forked tongue in the moonlight.

With a sob of horror he turned and fled down the road, as a man runs in a nightmare. He ran without purpose or reason. His numbed brain was incapable of conscious thought. He merely obeyed the blind primitive urge to run—run—run until he fell exhausted.

The black walls of the pines flowed endlessly past him; so he was seized with the illusion that he was getting nowhere. But presently a sound penetrated the fog of his terror—the steady, inexorable patter of feet behind him. Turning his head, he saw *something* loping after him— wolf or dog, he could not tell which, but his eyes glowed like balls of green fire. With a gasp he increased his speed, reeled around a bend in the road, and heard a horse snort; saw it rear and heard its rider curse; saw the gleam of blue steel in the man's lifted hand.

He staggered and fell, catching at the rider's stirrup.

"For God's sake, help me!" he panted. "The thing! It killed Branner— it's coming after me! *Look!*"

Twin balls of fire gleamed in the fringe of bushes at the turn of the road. The rider swore again, and on the heels of his profanity came the smashing report of his six-shooter—again and yet again. The fire-sparks vanished, and the rider, jerking his stirrup free from Griswell's grasp, spurred his horse at the bend. Griswell staggered up, shaking in every limb. The rider was out of sight only a moment; then he came galloping back.

"Took to the brush. Timber wolf, I reckon, though I never heard of one chasin' a man before. Do you know what it was?"

Griswell could only shake his head weakly.

The rider, etched in the moonlight, looked down at him, smoking pistol still lifted in his right hand. He was a compactly-built man of medium height, and his broad-brimmed planter's hat and his boots marked him as a native of the country as definitely as Griswell's garb stamped him as a stranger.

"What's all this about, anyway?"

"I don't know," Griswell answered helplessly. "My name's Griswell. John Branner—my friend who was traveling with me— we stopped at a deserted house back down the road to spend the night. Something—" at the memory he was choked by a rush of horror. "My God!" he screamed, "I must be mad! *Something* came and looked over the balustrade of the stair— something with a yellow face! I thought I dreamed it, but it must have been real. Then somebody began whistling upstairs, and Branner rose and went up the stairs

walking like a man in his sleep, or hypnotized. I heard him scream— or someone screamed; then he came down the stair again with a bloody hatchet in his hand—and my God, sir, he was *dead*! His head had been split open. I saw brains and clotted blood oozing down his face, and his face was that of a dead man.

"*But he came down the stair!* As God is my witness, John Branner was murdered in that dark upper hallway, and then his dead body came stalking down the stairs with a hatchet in its hand—to kill me!"

The rider made no reply; he sat his horse like a statue, outlined against the stars, and Griswell could not read his expression, his face shadowed by his hatbrim.

"You think I'm mad," he said hopelessly. "Perhaps I am."

"I don't know what to think," answered the rider. "If it was any house but the old Blassenville Manor— well, we'll see. My name's Buckner. I'm sheriff of this county. Took a colored man over to the county-seat in the next county and was ridin' back late."

He swung off his horse and stood beside Griswell, shorter than the lanky New Englander, but much harder knit. There was a natural manner of decision and certainty about him, and it was easy to believe that he would be a dangerous man in any sort of a fight.

"Are you afraid to go back to the house?" he asked, and Griswell shuddered, but shook his head, the dogged tenacity of Puritan ancestors asserting itself.

"The thought of facing that horror again turns me sick. But poor Branner—" he choked again. "We must find his body. My God!" he cried, unmanned by the abysmal horror of the thing; "what will we find? If a dead man walks, what—"

"We'll see." The sheriff caught the reins in the crook of his left elbow and began filling the empty chambers of his big blue pistol as they walked along.

AS THEY made the turn Griswell's blood was ice at the thought of what they might see lumbering up the road with bloody, grinning death-mask, but they saw only the house looming spectrally among the pines, down the road. A strong shudder shook Griswell.

"God, how *evil* that house looks, against those black pines! It looked sinister from the very first—when we went up the broken walk and saw those pigeons fly up from the porch—"

"Pigeons?" Buckner cast him a quick glance. "You saw the pigeons?"

"Why, yes! Scores of them perching on the porch railing."

They strode on for a moment in silence, before Buckner said abruptly: "I've lived in this country all my life. I've passed the old Blassenville place a thousand times, I reckon, at all hours of the day and night. But I never saw a pigeon anywhere around it, or anywhere else in these woods."

"There were scores of them," repeated Criswell, bewildered.

"I've seen men who swore they'd seen a flock of pigeons perched along the balusters just at sundown," said Buckner slowly. "Colored people, all of them except one man. A tramp. He was buildin' a fire in the yard, aimin' to camp there that night. I passed along there about dark, and he told me about the pigeons. I came back by there the next mornin'. The ashes of his fire were there, and his tin cup, and skillet where he'd fried pork, and his blankets looked like they'd been slept in. Nobody ever saw him again. That was twelve years ago. The Negroes say they can see the pigeons, but no Negro would pass along his road between sundown and sun-up. They say the pigeons are the souls of the Blassenvilles, let out of hell at sunset. The Negroes say the red glare in the west is the light from hell, because then the gates of hell are open, and the Blassenvilles fly out."

"Who were the Blassenvilles?" asked Griswell, shivering.

"They owned all this land here. French-English family. Came here from the West Indies before the Louisiana Purchase. The Civil War ruined them, like it did so many. Some were killed in the War; most of the others died out. Nobody's lived in the Manor since 1890 when Miss Elizabeth Blassenville, the last of the line, fled from the old house one night like it was a plague spot, and never came back to it— this your auto?"

They halted beside the car, and Griswell stared morbidly at the grim house. Its dusty panes were empty and blank; but they did not seem blind to him. It seemed to him that ghastly eyes were fixed hungrily on him through those darkened panes. Buckner repeated his question.

"Yes. Be careful. There's a snake on the seat— or there was."

"Not there now," grunted Buckner, tying his horse and pulling an electric torch out of the saddle-bag. "Well, let's have a look."

He strode up the broken brick-walk as matter-of-factly as if he were paying a social call on friends. Griswell followed close at his heels, his heart pounding suffocatingly. A scent of decay and moldering vegetation blew on the faint wind, and Griswell grew faint with nausea, that rose from a frantic abhorrence of these black woods, these ancient plantation houses that hid forgotten secrets of slavery and bloody pride and mysterious intrigues. He had thought of the South as a sunny, lazy land washed by soft breezes laden with spice and warm blossoms, where life ran tranquilly to the rhythm of black folk singing in sun-bathed cottonfields. But now he had discovered another, unsuspected side— a dark, brooding, fear-haunted side, and the discovery repelled him.

The oaken door sagged as it had before. The blackness of the interior was intensified by the beam of Buckner's light playing on the sill. That beam sliced through the darkness of the hallway and roved up the stair, and Griswell held his breath, clenching his fists. But no shape of lunacy leered down at them. Buckner went in, walking light as a cat, torch in one hand, gun in the other.

As he swung his light into the room across from the stairway, Griswell cried out— and cried out again, almost fainting with the intolerable sickness at what he saw. A trail of blood drops led across the floor, crossing the blankets Branner had occupied, which lay between the door and those in which Griswell had lain. And Griswell's blankets had a terrible occupant. John Branner lay there, face down, his cleft head revealed in merciless clarity in the steady light.

His outstretched hand still gripped the haft of a hatchet, and the blade was imbedded deep in the blanket and the floor beneath, just where Griswell's head had lain when he slept there.

A MOMENTARY rush of blackness engulfed Griswell. He was not aware that he staggered, or that Buckner caught him. When he could see and hear again, he was violently sick and hung his head against the mantel, retching miserably.

Buckner turned the light full on him, making him blink. Buckner's voice came from behind the blinding radiance, the man himself unseen.

"Griswell, you've told me a yarn that's hard to believe. I saw something chasin' you, but it might have been a timber wolf, or a mad dog.

"If you're holdin' back anything, you better spill it. What you told me won't hold up in any court. You're bound to be accused of killin' your partner. I'll have to arrest you. If you'll give me the straight goods now, it'll make it easier. Now, didn't you kill this fellow, Branner?

"Wasn't it something like this: you quarreled, he grabbed a hatchet and swung at you, but you dodged and then let him have it?"

Griswell sank down and hid his face in his hands, his head swimming.

"Great God, man, I didn't murder John! Why, we've been friends ever since we were children in school together. I've told you the truth. I don't blame you for not believing me. But God help me, it is the truth!"

The light swung back to the gory head again, and Griswell closed his eyes.

He heard Buckner grunt.

"I believe this hatchet in his hand is the one he was killed with. Blood and brains plastered on the blade, and hairs stickin' to it— hairs exactly the same color as his. This makes it pretty tough for you, Griswell."

"How so?" the New Englander asked dully.

"Knocks any plea of self-defense in the head. Branner couldn't have swung at you with this hatchet after you split his skull with it. You must have pulled the ax out of his head, stuck it into the floor and clamped his fingers on it to make it look like he'd attacked you. And it would have been damned clever—if you'd used another hatchet."

"But I didn't kill him," groaned Griswell. "I have no intention of pleading self-defense."

"That's what puzzles me," Buckner admitted frankly, straightening. "What murderer would rig up such a crazy story as you've told me, to prove his innocence? Average killer would have told a logical yarn, at least. Hmmm! Blood drops leadin' from the door. The body was dragged— no, couldn't have been dragged. The floor isn't smeared. You must have carried it here, after killin' him in some other place. But in that case, why isn't there any blood on your clothes? Of course you could have changed clothes and washed your hands. But the fellow hasn't been dead long."

"He walked downstairs and across the room," said Griswell hopelessly. "He came to kill me. I knew he was coming to kill me when I saw him lurching down the stairs. He struck where I would have been, if I hadn't awakened. That window— I burst out at it. You see it's broken."

"I see. But if he walked then, why isn't he walkin' now?"

"I don't know! I'm too sick to think straight. I've been fearing that he'd rise up from the floor where he lies and come at me again. When I heard that wolf running up the road after me, I thought it was John chasing me—John, running through the night with his bloody ax and his bloody head, and his death-grin!"

His teeth chattered as he lived that horror over again.

Buckner let his light play across the floor.

"The blood drops lead into the hall. Come on. We'll follow them."

Griswell cringed, "They lead upstairs."

Buckner's eyes were fixed hard on him.

"Are you afraid to go upstairs, with me?"

Griswell's face was gray.

"Yes. But I'm going, with you or without you. The thing that killed poor John may still be hiding up there."

"Stay behind me," ordered Buckner. "If anything jumps us, I'll take care of it. But for your own sake, I warn you that I shoot quicker than a cat jumps, and I don't often miss. If you've got any ideas of layin' me out from behind, forget them."

"Don't be a fool!" Resentment got the better of his apprehension, and this outburst seemed to reassure Buckner more than any of his protestations of innocence.

"I want to be fair," he said quietly. "I haven't indicted and condemned you in my mind already. If only half of what you're tellin' me is the truth, you've been through a hell of an experience, and I don't want to be too hard on you. But you can see how hard it is for me to believe all that you've told me."

Griswell wearily motioned for him to lead the way, unspeaking. They went out into the hall, paused at the landing. A thin string of crimson drops, distinct in the thick dust, led up the steps.

"Man's tracks in the dust," grunted Buckner. "Go slow. I've got to be sure of what I see, because we're obliterated them as we go up. Hmmm! One set goin' up, one comin' down. Same man. Not your tracks. Branner was a bigger man than you are. Blood drops all the way—blood on the bannisters like a man had laid his bloody hand there— a smear of stuff that looks— *brains*. Now what—"

"He walked down the stairs, a dead man," shuddered Griswell. "Groping with one hand— the other gripping the hatchet that killed him."

"Or was carried," muttered the sheriff. "But if somebody carried him— *where are the tracks?*"

THEY CAME out into the upper hallway, a vast, empty space of dust and shadows where, time-crusted windows repelled the moonlight and the ring of Buckner's torch seemed inadequate. Griswell trembled like a leaf. Here, in darkness and horror, John Branner had died.

"Somebody whistled up here," he muttered. "John came, as if he were being called."

Buckner's eyes were blazing strangely in the light.

"The footprints lead down the hall," he muttered. "Same as on the stairs— one set going, and one coming. Same prints— *Judas!*"

Behind him Griswell stifled a cry, for he had seen what prompted Buckner's exclamation. A few feet from the head of the stairs Branner's footprints stopped abruptly, then returned, treading almost in the other tracks. And where the trail halted there—was a great splash of blood on the dusty floor— and, other tracks met it— tracks of bare feet, narrow but with splayed toes. They too receded in a second line from the spot.

Buckner bent over them, swearing.

"The tracks meet! And where they meet there's blood and brains on the floor! Branner must have been killed on that spot— with a blow from a hatchet. Bare feet coming out of the darkness to meet shod feet— then both turned away again; the shod feet went downstairs, the bare feet went back down the hall." He directed his light down the hall. The footprints faded into darkness, beyond the reach of the beam. On either hand the closed doors of chambers were cryptic portals of mystery.

"Suppose your crazy tale *was* true," Buckner muttered, half to himself. "These aren't your tracks. They look like a woman's. Suppose somebody did whistle, and Branner went upstairs to investigate. Suppose somebody met him here in the dark and split his head. The signs and tracks would have been, in that case, just as they really are. But if that's so, why isn't Branner lyin' here where he was killed? Could he have lived long enough to take the hatchet away from whoever killed him, and stagger downstairs with it?"

"No, no!" Recollection gagged Griswell. "I saw him on the stairs. He was dead. No man could live a minute after receiving such a wound."

"I believe it," muttered Buckner. "But— it's madness! Or else it's *too* clever— yet, what sane man would think up and work out such an elaborate and utterly insane plan to escape punishment for murder, when a simple plea of self-defense would have been so much more effective? No court would recognize that story. Well, let's follow these other tracks. They lead down the hall—here, what's this?"

With an icy clutch at his soul, Griswell saw the light was beginning to grow dim.

"This battery is new," muttered Buckner, and for the first time Griswell caught an edge of fear in his voice. "Come on— out of here quick!"

The light had faded to a faint red glow. The darkness seemed straining into them, creeping with black cat-feet. Buckner retreated, pushing Griswell stumbling behind him as he walked backward, pistol cocked and lifted, down the dark hall. In the growing darkness Griswell heard what sounded like the stealthy opening of a door. And suddenly the blackness about them was vibrant with menace. Griswell knew Buckner sensed it as well as he, for the sheriff's hard body was tense and taut as a stalking panther's.

But without haste he worked his way to the stairs and backed down it, Griswell preceding him, and fighting the panic that urged him to scream and burst into mad flight. A ghastly thought brought icy sweat out on his flesh. *Suppose the dead man were creeping up the stairs behind them in the dark, face frozen in the death-grin, blood-caked hatchet lifted to strike?*

This possibility so overpowered him that he was scarcely aware when his feet struck the level of the lower hallway, and he was only then aware that the light had grown brighter as they descended, until it now gleamed with its full power— but when Buckner turned it back up the stairway, it failed to illuminate the darkness that hung like a tangible fog at the head of the stairs.

"The damn thing was conjured," muttered Buckner. "Nothin' else. It couldn't act like that naturally."

"Turn the light into the room," begged Griswell. "See if John— if John is—"

He could not put the ghastly thought into words, but Buckner understood.

He swung the beam around; and Griswell had never dreamed that the sight of the gory body of a murdered man could bring such relief.

"He's still there," grunted Buckner. "If he walked after he was killed, he hasn't walked since. But that thing—"

Again he turned the light up the stairs, and stood chewing his lip and scowling. Three times he half lifted his gun. Griswell read his mind. The sheriff was tempted to plunge back up that stairs, take his chance with the unknown. But common sense held him back.

"I wouldn't have a chance in the dark," he muttered. "And I've got a hunch the light would go out again."

He turned and faced Griswell squarely.

"There's no use dodgin' the question. There's somethin' hellish in this house, and I believe I have an inklin' of what it is. I don't believe you killed Branner. Whatever killed him is up there— now. There's a lot about your yarn that don't sound sane; but there's nothin' sane about a flashlight goin' out like this one did. I don't believe that thing upstairs is human. I never met anything I was afraid to tackle in the dark before, but I'm not goin' up there until daylight. It's not long until dawn. We'll wait for it out there on that gallery."

THE STARS were already paling when they came out on the broad porch. Buckner seated himself on the balustrade, facing the door, his pistol dangling in his fingers. Griswell sat down near him and leaned back against a crumbling pillar. He shut his eyes, grateful for the faint breeze that seemed to cool his throbbing brain. He experienced a dull sense of unreality. He was a stranger in a strange land, a land that had become suddenly imbued with black horror. The shadow of the noose hovered above him, and in that dark house lay John Branner, with his butchered head— like the figments of a dream these facts spun and eddied in his brain until finally all merged in a gray twilight as sleep came uninvited to his weary soul.

He awoke to a cold white dawn and full memory of the horrors of the night. Mists curled about the stems of the pines, crawled in smoky wisps up the broken walk. Buckner was shaking him.

"Wake up! It's daylight."

Griswell rose, wincing at the stiffness of his limbs. His face was gray and old.

"I'm ready. Let's go upstairs."

"I've already been!" Buckner's eyes burned in the early dawn. "I didn't wake you up. I went as soon as it was light. I found nothin'."

"The tracks of the bare feet—"

"Gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes, gone! The dust had been disturbed all over the hall, from the point where Branner's tracks ended; swept into corners. No chance of trackin' anything there now. Something obliterated those tracks while we sat here, and I didn't hear a sound. I've gone through the whole house. Not a sign of anything."

Griswell shuddered at the thought of himself sleeping alone on the porch while Buckner was in the house conducting his exploration.

"What shall we do?" he asked listlessly. "With those tracks gone, there goes my only chance of proving my story."

"We'll take Branner's body into the county-seat," answered Buckner. "Let me do the talkin'. If the authorities knew the facts as they appear, they'd insist on you being confined and indicted. I don't believe you killed, Branner— but neither a district attorney, judge nor jury would believe what you told me, or what happened to us last night.

"I'm handlin' this thing my own way. I'm not goin' to arrest you until I've exhausted every other possibility.

"Say nothin' about what's happened here, when we get to town. I'll simply tell the district attorney that John Branner was killed by a party or parties unknown, and that I'm workin' on the case.

"Are you game to come back with me to this house and spend the night here, sleepin' in that room as you and Branner slept last night?"

Griswell went white; but answered as stoutly as his ancestors might have expressed their determination to hold their cabins in the teeth of the Pequots: "I'll do it."

"Let's go then; help me pack the body out to your auto."

Griswell's soul revolted at the sight of John Branner's bloodless face in the chill white dawn, and the feel of his clammy flesh. The gray fog wrapped wispy tentacles about their feet as they carried their grisly burden across the lawn.

2: The Snake's Brother.

AGAIN THE SHADOWS were lengthening over the pinelands, and again two men came bumping along the old road in a car with a New England license plate.

Buckner was driving. Griswell's nerves were too shattered for him to trust himself at the wheel. He looked gaunt and haggard, and his face was still pallid. The strain of the day spent at the county-seat was added to the horror that still rode his soul like the shadow of a black-winged vulture. He had not slept, had not tasted what he had eaten.

"I told you I'd tell you about the Blassenvilles," said Buckner. "They were proud folks, haughty, and pretty damn ruthless when they wanted their way. They didn't treat their help as well as other planters did— got their ideas in the West Indies, I reckon. There was a streak of cruelty in them— especially Miss Celia, the last one of the family to come to these parts. That was long after the slaves had been freed, but she used to whip her mulatto maid just like she was a slave, the old folks say.... The Negroes said when a Blassenville died, the devil was always waitin' for him out in the black pines.

"Well, after the Civil War they died off pretty fast livin' in poverty on the plantation which was allowed to go to ruin. Finally only four girls were left, sisters, livin' in the old house and ekin' out a bare livin', with a few Negroes livin' in the old slave huts and workin' the fields on the share. They kept to themselves, bein'

proud, and ashamed of their poverty. Folks wouldn't see them for months at a time. When they needed supplies they sent a Negro to town after them.

"But folks knew about it when Miss Celia came to live with them. She came from somewhere in the West Indies, where the whole family originally had its roots— a fine, handsome woman, they say, in the early thirties. But she didn't mix with folks any more than the girls did. She brought a mulatto maid with her, and the Blassenville cruelty cropped out in her treatment of this maid.

"I knew an old Negro years ago, who swore he saw Miss Celia tie this girl up to a tree, stark naked, and whip her with a horse-whip. Nobody was surprised when she disappeared. Everybody figured she'd run away, of course.

"Well, one day in the spring of 1890 Miss Elizabeth, the youngest girl, came in to town for the first time in maybe a year. She came after supplies. Said the Negroes had all left the place. Talked a little more, too, a bit wild. Said Miss Celia had gone, without leaving any word. Said her sisters thought she'd gone back to the West Indies, but she believed her aunt *was still in the house*. She didn't say what she meant. Just got her supplies and pulled out for the Manor.

"A month went past, and a Negro came into town and said that Miss Elizabeth was livin' at the Manor alone. Said her three sisters weren't there any more, that they'd left one by one without givin' any word or explanation. She didn't know where they'd gone, and was afraid to stay there alone, but didn't know where else to go. She'd never known anything but the Manor, and had neither relatives nor friends. But she was in mortal terror of *something*. The Negro said she locked herself in her room at night and kept candles burnin' all night....

"It was a stormy spring night when Miss Elizabeth came tearin' into town on the one horse she owned, nearly dead from fright. She fell from her horse in the square; when she could talk she said she'd found a secret room in the Manor that had been forgotten for a hundred years. And she said that there she found her three sisters, dead, and hangin' by their necks from the ceilin'. She said *something* chased her and nearly brained her with an ax as she ran out the front door, but somehow she got to the horse and got away. She was nearly crazy with fear, and didn't know what it was that chased her— said it looked like a woman with a yellow face.

"About a hundred men rode out there, right away. They searched the house from top to bottom, but they didn't find any secret room, or the remains of the sisters. But they did find a hatchet stickin' in the doorjamb downstairs, with some of Miss Elizabeth's hairs stuck on it, just as she'd said. She wouldn't go back there and show them how to find the secret door; almost went crazy when they suggested it.

"When she was able to travel, the people made up some money and loaned it to her— she was still too proud to accept charity— and she went to California. She

never came back, but later it was learned, when she sent back to repay the money they'd loaned her, that she'd married out there.

"Nobody ever bought the house. It stood there just as she'd left it, and as the years passed folks stole all the furnishings out of it, poor white trash, I reckon. A Negro wouldn't go about it. But they came after sun-up and left there long before sun-down."

"WHAT DID the people think about Miss Elizabeth's story?" asked Griswell.

"Well, most folks thought she'd gone a little crazy, livin' in that old house alone. But some people believed that mulatto girl, Joan, didn't run away, after all. They believed she'd hidden in the woods, and glutted her hatred of the Blassenvilles by murderin' Miss Celia and the three girls. They beat up the woods with bloodhounds, but never found a trace of her. If there was a secret room in the house, she might have been hidin' there— if there was anything to that theory."

"She couldn't have been hiding there all these years," muttered Griswell.

"Anyway, the thing in the house now isn't human."

Buckner wrenched the wheel around and turned into a dim trace that left the main road and meandered off through the pines.

"Where you going?"

"There's an old Negro that lives off this way a few miles. I want to talk to him. We're up against something that takes more than white man's sense. The black people know more than we do about some things. This old man is nearly a hundred years old. His master educated him when he was a boy, and after he was freed he traveled more extensively than most white men do. They say he's a voodoo man."

Griswell shivered at the phrase, staring uneasily at the green forest walls that shut them in. The scent of the pines was mingled with the odors of unfamiliar plants and blossoms. But underlying all was a reek of rot and decay. Again a sick abhorrence of these dark mysterious woodlands almost overpowered him.

"Voodoo!" he muttered. "I'd forgotten about that— I never could think of black magic in connection with the South. To me witchcraft was always associated with old crooked streets in waterfront towns, overhung by gabled roofs that were old when they were hanging witches in Salem; dark musty alleys where black cats and other things might steal at night. Witchcraft always meant the old towns of New England, to me— but all this is more terrible than any New England legend— these somber pines, old deserted houses, lost plantations, mysterious black people, old tales of madness and horror— God, what frightful, ancient terrors there are on this continent fools call 'young'!"

"Here's old Jacob's hut," announced Buckner, bringing the automobile to a halt.

Griswell saw a clearing and a small cabin squatting under the shadows of the huge trees. There pines gave way to oaks and cypresses, bearded with gray trailing moss, and behind the cabin lay the edge of a swamp that ran away under the dimness of the trees, choked with rank vegetation. A thin wisp of blue smoke curled up from the stick-and-mud chimney.

He followed Buckner to the tiny stoop, where the sheriff pushed open the leather-hinged door and strode in. Griswell blinked in the comparative dimness of the interior. A single small window let in a little daylight. An old Negro crouched beside the hearth, watching a pot stew over the open fire.

He looked up as they entered, but did not rise. He seemed incredibly old. His face was a mass of wrinkles, and his eyes, dark and vital, were filmed momentarily at times as if his mind wandered.

Buckner motioned Griswell to sit down in a string-bottomed chair, and himself took a crudely-made bench near the hearth, facing the old man.

"Jacob," he said bluntly, "the time's come for you to talk. I know you know the secret of Blassenville Manor. I've never questioned you about it, because it wasn't in my line. But a man was murdered there last night, and this man here may hang for it, unless you tell me what haunts that old house of the Blassenvilles."

The old man's eyes gleamed, then grew misty as if clouds of extreme age drifted across his brittle mind.

"The Blassenvilles," he murmured, and his voice was mellow and rich; his speech not the patois of the piny woods daky. "They were proud people, sirs—proud and cruel. Some died in the war, some were killed in duels— the men-folks, sirs. Some died in the Manor— the old Manor—" His voice trailed off into unintelligible mumblings.

"What of the Manor?" asked Buckner patiently.

"Miss Celia was the proudest of them all," the old man muttered. "The proudest and the crudest. The black people hated her; Joan most of all. Joan had white blood in her, and she was proud, too. Miss Celia whipped her like a slave."

"What is the secret of Blassenville Manor?" persisted Buckner.

THE FILM FADED from the old man's eyes; they were dark as moonlit wells.

"What secret, sir? I do not understand."

"Yes, you do. For years that old house has stood there with its mystery. You know the key to its riddle."

The old man stirred the stew. He seemed perfectly rational now.

"Sir, life is sweet, even to an old black man."

"You mean somebody would kill you if you told me?"

But the old man was mumbling again, his eyes clouded.

"Not somebody. No human. No human being. The black gods of the swamps. My secret is inviolate, guarded by the Big Serpent, the god above all gods. He

would send a little brother to kiss me with his cold lips— a little brother, with a white crescent moon on his head. I sold my soul to the Big Serpent when he made me maker of *zuvembies*—"

Buckner stiffened.

"I heard that word once before," he said softly, "from the lips of a dying black man, when I was a child. What does it mean?"

Fear filled the eyes of old Jacob.

"What have I said? No— no! I said nothing."

"*Zuvembies*," prompted Buckner.

"*Zuvembies*," mechanically repeated the old man, his eyes vacant. "A *zuvembie* was once a woman— on the Slave Coast they know of them. The drums that whisper by night in the hills of Haiti tell of them. The makers of *zuvembies* are honored of the people of Damballah.

"It is death to speak of it to a white man— it is one of the Snake God's forbidden secrets."

"YOU SPEAK OF the *zuvembies*," said Buckner softly.

"I must not speak of it," mumbled the old man, and Griswell realized that he was thinking aloud, too far gone in his dotage to be aware that he was speaking at all. "No white man must know that I danced in the Black Ceremony of the voodoo, and was made a maker of *zombies* and *zuvembies*. The Big Snake punishes loose tongues with death."

"A *zuvembie* is a woman?" prompted Buckner.

"*Was* a woman," the old Negro muttered. "*She* knew I was a maker of *zuvembies*— she came and stood in my hut and asked for the awful brew—the brew of ground snake-bones, and the blood of vampire bats, and the dew from a night-hawk's wings, and other elements unnameable. She had danced in the Black Ceremony— she was ripe to become a *zuvembie*— the Black Brew was all that was needed—the other was beautiful—I could not refuse her."

"Who?" demanded Buckner tensely, but the old man's head was sunk on his withered breast, and he did not reply. He seemed to slumber as he sat. Buckner shook him. "You gave a brew to make a woman a *zuvembie*— what is a *zuvembie*?"

The old man stirred resentfully and muttered drowsily.

"A *zuvembie* is no longer human. It knows neither relatives nor friends. It is one with the people of the Black World. It commands the natural demons— owls, bats, snakes and werewolves, and can fetch darkness to blot out a little light. It can be slain by lead or steel, but unless it is slain thus, it lives forever, and it eats no such food as humans eat. It dwells like a bat in a cave or an old house. Time means naught to the *zuvembie*; an hour, a day, a year, all is one. It cannot speak human words, nor think as a human thinks, but it can hypnotize the living by the

sound of its voice, and when it slays a man it can command his lifeless body until the flesh is cold. As long as the blood flows, the corpse is its slave. Its pleasure lies in the slaughter of human beings."

"And why should one become a *zuvembie*?" asked Buckner softly.

"Hate," whispered the old man. "Hate! Revenge!"

"Was her name Joan?" murmured Buckner.

IT WAS AS IF the name penetrated the fogs of senility that clouded the voodoo-man's mind.

He shook himself and the film faded from his eyes, leaving them hard and gleaming as wet black marble.

"Joan?" he said slowly. "I have not heard that name for the span of a generation. I seem to have been sleeping, gentlemen; I do not remember— I ask your pardon. Old men fall asleep before the fire, like old dogs. You asked me of Blassenville Manor? Sir, if I were to tell you why I cannot answer you, you would deem it mere superstition. Yet the white man's God be my witness—"

As he spoke he was reaching across the hearth for a piece of firewood, groping among the heaps of sticks there. And his voice broke in a scream, as he jerked back his arm convulsively. And a horrible, thrashing, trailing *thing* came with it. Around the voodoo-man's arm a mottled length of that shape was wrapped, and a wicked wedge-shaped head struck again in silent fury.

The old man fell on the-hearth, screaming, upsetting the simmering pot and scattering the embers, and then Buckner caught up a billet of firewood and crushed that flat head. Cursing, he kicked aside the knotting, twisting trunk, glaring briefly at the mangled head.

Old Jacob had ceased screaming and writhing; he lay still, staring glassily upward.

"Dead?" whispered Griswell.

"Dead as Judas Iscariot," snapped Buckner, frowning at the twitching reptile. "That infernal snake crammed enough poison into his veins to kill a dozen men his age. But I think it was the shock and fright that killed him."

"What shall we do?" asked Griswell, shivering.

"Leave the body on that bunk. Nothin' can hurt it, if we bolt the door so the wild hogs can't get in, or any cat. We'll carry it into town tomorrow. We've got work to do tonight. Let's get goin'."

Griswell shrank from touching the corpse, but he helped Buckner lift it on the rude bunk, and then stumbled hastily out of the hut. The sun was hovering above the horizon, visible in dazzling red flame through the black stems of the trees.

They climbed into the car in silence, and went bumping back along the stumpy train.

"He said the Big Snake would send one of his brothers," muttered Griswell.

"Nonsense!" snorted Buckner. "Snakes like warmth, and that swamp is full of them. It crawled in and coiled up among that firewood. Old Jacob disturbed it, and it bit him. Nothin' supernatural about that." After a short silence he said, in a different voice, "That was the first time I ever saw a rattler strike without singin'; and the first time I ever saw a snake *with a white crescent moon on its head*."

They were turning in to the main road before either spoke again.

"You think that the mulatto Joan has skulked in the house all these years?" Griswell asked.

"You heard what old Jacob said," answered Buckner grimly. "Time means nothin' to a *zuvembie*."

As they made the last turn in the road, Griswell braced himself against the sight of Blassenville Manor looming black against the red sunset. When it came into view he bit his lip to keep from shrieking. The suggestion of cryptic horror came back in all its power.

"Look!" he whispered from dry lips, as they came to a halt beside the road. Buckner grunted.

From the balustrades of the gallery rose a whirling cloud of pigeons that swept away into the sunset, black against the lurid glare.

3: *The Call of Zuvembie*

BOTH MEN sat rigid for a few moments after the pigeons had flown.

"Well, I've seen them, at last," muttered Buckner.

"Only the doomed see them, perhaps," whispered Griswell. "That tramp saw them—"

"Well, we'll see," returned the Southerner tranquilly, as he climbed out of the car, but Griswell noted that he unconsciously hitched forward his scabbarded gun.

The oaken door sagged on broken hinges. Their feet echoed on the broken brick walk. The blind windows reflected the sunset in sheets of flame. As they came into the broad hall Griswell saw the string of black marks that ran across the floor and into the chamber, marking the path of a dead man.

Buckner had brought blankets out of the automobile. He spread them before the fireplace.

"I'll lie next to the door," he said. "You lie where you did last night."

"Shall we light a fire in the grate?" asked Griswell, dreading the thought of the blackness that would cloak the woods when the brief twilight had died.

"No. You've got a flashlight and so have I. We'll lie here in the dark and see what happens. Can you use that gun I gave you?"

"I suppose so. I never fired a revolver, but I know how it's done."

"Well, leave the shootin' to me, if possible." The sheriff seated himself cross-legged on his blankets and emptied the cylinder of his big blue Colt, inspecting each cartridge with a critical eye before he replaced it.

Griswell prowled nervously back and forth, begrudging the slow fading of the light as a miser begrudges the waning of his gold. He leaned with one hand against the mantelpiece, staring down into the dust-covered ashes. The fire that produced those ashes must have been built by Elizabeth Blassenville, more than forty years before. The thought was depressing. Idly he stirred the dusty ashes with his toe. Something came to view among the charred debris— a bit of paper, stained and yellowed. Still idly he bent and drew it out of the ashes. It was a note-book with moldering cardboard backs.

"What have you found?" asked Buckner, squinting down the gleaming barrel of his gun.

"Nothing but an old note-book. Looks like a diary. The pages are covered with writing— but the ink is so faded, and the paper is in such a state of decay that I can't tell much about it. How do you suppose it came in the fireplace, without being burned up?"

"Thrown in long after the fire was out," surmised Buckner. "Probably found and tossed in the fireplace by somebody who was in here stealin' furniture. Likely somebody who couldn't read."

GRISWELL fluttered the crumbling leaves listlessly, straining his eyes in the fading light over the yellowed scrawls. Then he stiffened.

"Here's an entry that's legible! Listen!" He read:

" 'I know someone is in the house besides myself. I can hear someone prowling about at night when the sun has set and the pines are black outside. Often in the night I hear *it* fumbling at my door. *Who* is it? Is it one of my sisters? Is it Aunt Celia? If it is either of these, why does she steal so subtly about the house? Why does she tug at my door, and glide away when I call to her? Shall I open the door and go out to her? No, no! I dare not! I am afraid. Oh God, what shall I do? I dare not stay here— but where am I to go?' "

"By God!" ejaculated Buckner. "That must be Elizabeth Blassenville's diary! Go on!"

"I can't make out the rest of the page," answered Griswell. "But a few pages further on I can make out some lines." He read:

" 'Why did the Negroes all run away when Aunt Celia disappeared? My sisters are dead. I know they are dead. I seem to sense that they died horribly, in fear and agony. But why? *Why*? If someone murdered Aunt Celia, why should that person murder my poor sisters? They were always kind to the black people. Joan—' " He paused, scowling futilely.

"A piece of the page is torn out. Here's another entry under another date— at least I judge it's a date; I can't make it out for sure.

" '—the awful thing that the old Negress hinted at? She named Jacob Blount, and Joan, but she would not speak plainly; perhaps she feared to—' Part of it gone here; then:

" 'No, no! How can it be? *She* is dead— or gone away. Yet— she was born and raised in the West Indies, and from hints she let fall in the past, I know she delved into the mysteries of the voodoo. I believe she even danced in one of their horrible ceremonies—how could she have been such a beast? And this—this horror. God, can such things be? I know not what to think. If it is *she* who roams the house at night, who fumbles at my door, who *whistles* so weirdly and sweetly— no, no, I must be going mad. If I stay here alone I shall die as hideously as my sisters must have died. Of that I am convinced.' "

THE INCOHERENT chronicle ended as abruptly as it had begun. Griswell was so engrossed in deciphering the scraps that he was not aware that darkness had stolen upon them, hardly aware that Buckner was holding his electric torch for him to read by. Waking from his abstraction he started and darted a quick glance at the black hallway.

"What do you make of it?"

"What I've suspected all the time," answered Buckner. "That mulatto maid Joan turned *zuvembie* to avenge herself on Miss Celia. Probably hated the whole family as much as she did her mistress. She'd taken part in voodoo ceremonies on her native island until she was 'ripe,' as old Jacob said. All she needed was the Black Brew— he supplied that. She killed Miss Celia and the three older girls; and would have gotten Elizabeth but for chance. She's been lurkin' in this old house all these years, like a snake in a ruin."

"But why should she murder a stranger?"

"You heard what old Jacob said," reminded Buckner. "A *zuvembie* finds satisfaction in the slaughter of humans. She called Branner up the stair and split his head and stuck the hatchet in his hand, and sent him downstairs to murder you. No court will ever believe that, but if we can produce her body, that will be evidence enough to prove your innocence. My word will be taken, that she murdered Branner. Jacob said a *zuvembie* could be killed... in reporting this affair I don't have to be too accurate in detail."

"She came and peered over the balustrade of the stair at us," muttered Griswell. "But why didn't we find her tracks on the stair?"

"Maybe you dreamed it. Maybe a *zuvembie* can project her spirit— hell! why try to rationalize something that's outside the bounds of rationality? Let's begin our watch."

"Don't turn out the light!" exclaimed Griswell involuntarily. Then he added: "Of course. Turn it out. We must be in the dark as"— he gagged a bit— "as Branner and I were."

But fear like a physical sickness assailed him when the room was plunged in darkness. He lay trembling and his heart beat so heavily he felt as if he would suffocate.

"The West Indies must be the plague spot of the world," muttered Buckner, a blur on his blankets. "I've heard of *zombies*. Never knew before what a *zuvembie* was. Evidently some drug concocted by the voodoo-men to induce madness in women. That doesn't explain the other things, though: the hypnotic powers, the abnormal longevity, the ability to control corpses— no, a *zuvembie* can't be merely a madwoman.

"It's a monster, something more and less than a human being, created by the magic that spawns in black swamps and jungles— well, we'll see."

HIS VOICE ceased, and in the silence Griswell heard the pounding of his own heart.

Outside in the black woods a wolf howled eerily, and owls hooted. Then silence fell again like a black fog.

Griswell forced himself to lie still on his blankets. Time seemed at a standstill. He felt as if he were choking. The suspense was growing unendurable; the effort he made to control his crumbling nerves bathed his limbs in sweat. He clenched his teeth until his jaws ached and almost locked, and the nails of his fingers bit deeply into his palms.

He did not know what he was expecting. The fiend would strike again— but how? Would it be a horrible, sweet whistling, bare feet stealing down the creaking steps, or a sudden hatchet-stroke in the dark? Would it choose him or Buckner? *Was Buckner already dead?* He could see nothing in the blackness, but he heard the man's steady breathing. The Southerner must have nerves of steel. Or was that Buckner breathing beside him, separated by a narrow strip of darkness? Had the fiend already struck in-silence, and taken the sheriff's place, there to lie in ghoulish glee until it was ready to strike?— a thousand hideous fancies assailed Griswell tooth and claw.

He began to feel that he would go mad if he did not leap to his feet, screaming, and burst frenziedly out of that accursed house— not even the fear of the gallows could keep him lying there in the darkness any longer— the rhythm of Buckner's breathing was suddenly broken, and Griswell felt as if a bucket of ice-water had been poured over him. From somewhere above them rose a sound of weird, sweet whistling....

Griswell's control snapped, plunging his brain into darkness deeper than the physical blackness which engulfed him. There was a period of absolute blankness,

in which a realization of *motion* was his first sensation of awakening consciousness. He was running, madly, stumbling over an incredibly rough road. All was darkness about him, and he ran blindly. Vaguely he realized that he must have bolted from the house, and fled for perhaps miles before his over-wrought brain began to function. He did not care; dying on the gallows for a murder he never committed did not terrify him half as much as the thought of returning to that house of horror. He was overpowered by the urge to run— run— run as he was running now, blindly, until he reached the end of his endurance. The mist had not yet fully lifted from his brain, but he was aware of a dull wonder that he could not see the stars through the black branches. He wished vaguely that he could see where he was going.

He believed he must be climbing a hill, and that was strange, for he knew there were no hills within miles of the Manor.

Then above and ahead of him a dim glow began.

HE SCRAMBLED toward it, over ledge-like projections that were more and more taking on a disquieting symmetry. Then he was horror-stricken to realize that a sound was impacting on his ears— *a weird mocking whistle*. The sound swept the mists away. Why, what was this? Where was he? Awakening and realization came like the stunning stroke of a butcher's maul. He was not fleeing along a road, or climbing a hill; he was mounting a stair. He was still in Blassenville Manor! *And he was climbing the stair!*

An inhuman scream burst from his lips. Above it the mad whistling rose in a ghoulis piping of demoniac triumph. He tried to stop— to turn back— even to fling himself over the balustrade. His shrieking rang unbearably in his own ears. But his will-power was shattered to bits. It did not exist. He had no will. He had dropped his flashlight, and he had forgotten the gun in his pocket. He could not command his own body.

His legs, moving stiffly, worked like pieces of mechanism detached from his brain, obeying an outside will. Clumping methodically they carried him shrieking up the stair toward the witch-fire glow shimmering above him.

"Buckner!" he screamed. "Buckner! Help, for God's sake!"

His voice strangled in his throat. He had reached the upper landing. He was tottering down the hallway. The whistling sank and ceased, but its impulsion still drove him on. He could not see from what source the dim glow came. It seemed to emanate from no central focus. But he saw a vague figure shambling toward him. It looked like a woman, but no human woman ever walked with that skulking gait, and no human woman ever had that face of horror, that leering yellow blur of lunacy— he tried to scream at the sight of that face, at the glint of keen steel in the uplifted claw-like hand— but his tongue was frozen.

Then something crashed deafeningly behind him; the shadows were split by a tongue of flame which-lit a hideous figure falling backward. Hard on the heels of the report rang an inhuman squawk.

In the darkness that followed the flash Griswell fell to his knees and covered his face with his hands. He did not hear Buckner's voice.

The Southerner's hand on his shoulder shook him out of his swoon.

A light in his eyes blinded him. He blinked, shaded his eyes, looked up into Buckner's face, bending at the rim of the circle of light. The sheriff was pale.

"Are you hurt? God, man, are you hurt? There's a butcher knife there on the floor—"

"I'm not hurt," mumbled Griswell. "You fired just in time— the fiend! Where is it? Where did it go?"

"Listen!"

Somewhere in the house there sounded a sickening flopping and flapping as of something that thrashed and straggled in its death convulsions.

"Jacob was right," said Buckner grimly. "Lead can kill them. I hit her, all right. Didn't dare use my flashlight, but there was enough light. When that whistlin' started you almost walked over me gettin' out. I knew you were hypnotized, or whatever it is. I followed you up the stairs. I was right behind you, but crouchin' low so she wouldn't see me, and maybe get away again. I almost waited too long before I fired— but the sight of her almost paralyzed me. Look!"

He flashed his light down the hall, and now it shone bright and clear. And it shone on an aperture gaping in the wall where no door had showed before.

"The secret panel Miss Elizabeth found!" Buckner snapped. "Come on!"

He ran across the hallway and Griswell followed him dazedly. The flopping and thrashing came from beyond that mysterious door, and now the sounds had ceased.

THE LIGHT revealed a narrow, tunnel-like corridor that evidently led through one of the thick walls. Buckner plunged into it without hesitation.

"Maybe it couldn't think like a human," he muttered, shining his light ahead of him. "But it had sense enough to erase its tracks last night so we couldn't trail it to that point in the wall and maybe find the secret panel. There's a room ahead—the secret room of the Blassenvilles!"

And Griswell cried out: "My God! It's the windowless chamber I saw in my dream, with the three bodies hanging— ahhhhh!"

Buckner's light playing about the circular chamber became suddenly motionless. In that wide ring of light three figures appeared, three dried, shriveled, mummy-like shapes, still clad in the moldering garments of the last century. Their slippers were clear of the floor as they hung by their withered necks from chains suspended from the ceiling.

"The three Blassenville sisters!" muttered Buckner. "Miss Elizabeth wasn't crazy, after all."

"Look!" Griswell could barely make his voice intelligible. "There— over there in the corner!"

The light moved, halted.

"Was that thing a woman once?" whispered Griswell. "God, look at that face, even in death. Look at those claw-like hands, with black talons like those of a beast. Yes, it was human, though— even the rags of an old ballroom gown.

"Why should a mulatto maid wear such a dress, I wonder?"

"This has been her lair for over forty years," muttered Buckner, brooding over the grinning grisly thing sprawling in the corner. "This clears you, Griswell— a crazy woman with a hatchet— that's all the authorities need to know. God, what a revenge!—what a foul revenge! Yet what a bestial nature she must have had, in the beginnin', to delve into voodoo as she must have done—"

"The mulatto woman?" whispered Griswell, dimly sensing a horror that overshadowed all the rest of the terror.

Buckner shook his head. "We misunderstood old Jacob's maunderin's, and the things Miss Elizabeth wrote— *she* must have known, but family pride sealed her lips. Griswell, I understand now; the mulatto woman had her revenge, but not as we'd supposed. She didn't drink the Black Brew old Jacob fixed for her. It was for somebody else, to be given secretly in her food, or coffee, no doubt. Then Joan ran away, leavin' the seeds of the hell she'd sowed to grow."

"That— that's not the mulatto woman?" whispered Griswell.

"When I saw her out there in the hallway I knew she was no mulatto. And those distorted features still reflect a family likeness. I've seen her portrait, and I can't be mistaken. There lies the creature that was once Celia Blassenville."

11: Limelight at Sudden Jerk

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

The Weekly Times Annual, 4 Nov 1915

THE SUDDEN JERK MILL, with its five stamps of eleven hundred pounds each running on 15-penny-weight ore, changed its note with the variation of the wind. The Westralian air, all lucent gold, flooded the sky as if by diffused electrics around the spring of a blue dome; it was an atmosphere of wine, and the sun gilded the pink shafts of the salmon gum, the flutings of the gimlet woods, and the harsh and funereal needles of the sheoak.

Tony Basteel, who, with his very English mate, Egbert de la Touche, owned the Sudden Jerk, listened to the growl of the crazy mill; uplifted as a musician hearing a great orchestra performing R. Wagner's imitation of Krupp's foundry at Essen. He loved every note of its thunder, and knew the time for every cam to lift, each to the second; the two hits, and then a trip, with the last three together, and each stamp turning gravely and slowly around with the suggestion of a dignified old gentleman forced to dance. He looked appreciatively at the small heap of tails by the cyanide vats; for the tails were run to the stopes for filling, and the little heap meant that work was running its cycle faithfully and well.

Tony's white-washed camp and bough shed on a rise to the west of the battery hill stood in a belt of salmon gum and bulloak, and the red earth before it was dotted with the delicate green of young saltbush. A splash of white on the dead green of a belt of bulloak was the tent-hut of de la Touche.

Mrs Tony came down from the house to where her husband stood well within earshot of the beloved music of the mill. She was like Tony in her meagreness—tall, thin, strong, tireless, and with eyes swift and piercing. Tony's face was harder of skin, and there were the marks of old Barcoo on his mahogany-tinted hands, strong, knotted, sinewed with steelwire; but otherwise they seemed a male and a female hop-pole, dry, seasoned and strong. Of great kindness, and very helpful to each other; steadfast friends, helpers in time of trouble. The virtues of many people are, like blind reefs, covered with the alluvium of habit; and discovery comes only by sinking. Tony and his wife were like that; knowledge of them gave them beauty in the eyes of understanding people. A great lady, who was a cad, laughed aloud at first sight of them, and then was silent when she found herself alone in the joke, her audience seeing Mrs Tony and Tony as they were— a lady and gentleman of the bush.

Mrs Tony arrived at her husband's side as de la Touche drove up from the horse yard in the light jinker of the mine. De la Touche was still English, though he had been in Australia long enough to learn bushcraft. His pink and chubby face, his little and round figure, his close-cropped fair hair and "toothbrush" red moustache

spoke of Piccadilly Circus, and he still talked as if he had never left the little street around St. James's. There was a new self-consciousness in him that day, as there was in Tony and his wife. They were six miles from the township of Golden Cape, and they rarely had a visitor; and the knowledge that His Excellency the Governor, Sir Dyke Acland Cowley Hoodman Groves, K.C.M.G., was to visit Sudden Jerk that day had brought the shyness of the three of them to the surface, so that they were ready to be rude in order to conceal self-consciousness. And Mrs Tony had come down to say, with the air of a woman bettering the discoveries of Columbus, that the roast fowls were cooling for the Governor's lunch, and that the wild turkey was browning splendidly.

"An' don't you go pickin' the fowls, Tony," she concluded. "They're for the Gov'nor."

Tony growled shamefacedly that he wasn't a kid, and his wife replied that she knew his ways, and didn't want no pickin' the fowls anyhow. Then she consolidated her position as speaker of the last word by addressing de la Touche.

"Egbert," she said, "while y'r in at the Cape get five bobs' worth o' scones at the baker's."

"By Jing, yes," replied Tony's mate. "And look here, I say, His— ah— Excellency might want ca-ake. What?"

"I got plenty er tins o' cake— jest ther scones."

"The old Guv'nah can take his tot," said de la Touche. "Got any— ah— whiskay, Ton-ay?"

"Whips!"

"I'll get a box of— ah— cigahs and some cigarwettes. What?"

"Right-o, Egbert."

De la Touche flicked the big bay horse, and drove down the track between the dumps and disappeared in the thick salmon gum and gimlet scrub eastward of the mine. Tony and his wife were left with their self-consciousness growing into something like fear of this being from another world: a Governor with something of the divine right of kings.

They had no need. Sir Dyke Acland Cowley Hoodman Groves, K.C.M.G., was new to the business, a gentleman of a rich heart and a poor brain, very anxious to please; and more frightened of his "subjects" and the knowledge that had come to them by touching the real things of life every day, and being always at grips with the bush that gave them neither food nor water, but only sunlight and gold.

When Sir Dyke, and all the rest of it, drove up with his aide and an escort of two mounted police, they found him to be a tall, thin, pink man with foolish blue eyes, an indecisive chin, and a "toothbrush" moustache so like de la Touche's that it seemed as if both owned a common origin. He spoke very Englishly, too: but more so than de la Touche, whom the bush had leached of many mannerisms. He had developed a kindliness that made more friends for him than genius finds

admirers; and to his self-deprecating grin there was added the persistence of the bloodhound, to which fact he owed his job as Governor. Persistently deprecating himself as a poor thing in Downing street, he persistently showed that he should be given a job, if only in recognition of his tremendous modesty. And his job came to him for two reasons; he had the high-placed influence which counts so much in England as a help to wealthy posts "abroad," and the Government was irritated into appointing him to get rid of him. The Governorship of Westralia was going, and he might have that if he wished." It sounded like cold meat to a beggar, but Dyke Acland, &c., took it gratefully, and fitted it as water water shapes itself to the cup by reason of his unfailing good humor, and ever-present desire to please.

They were all feeling good to him by the time de la Touche arrived, unaccountably annoyed because accident had delayed him beyond lunch and the distinction of breaking bread with the Governor. He admired everything— the sun and the salmon gum, the mine and the shaft. He temporarily lost the respect of Tony by remarking that the stopes at the 125ft. level, where a little specimen gold was showing, were "sweetly pretty," and won the respect again by complimenting Mrs Tony on the cooking of the turkey and the fowls. They were like old friends when de la Touche returned as they waited for afternoon tea.

"You must— ah— have had— ah— striking adventures while prospecting, Mistah Bas-teel," said the Governor.

"Betcher life," replied Tony. "I had whips o' tucker an' no water. I tell y' I was worse off than the Nolan's Perish. Jim an' Joe an' Paddy an' Hubert—four brothers from the Loddon— way back in eighty-one— back o' the Bidgie—before there was any Broken Hill or Silverton, either "

But he was too slow on the uptake, and de la Touche rushed into the silence of a moment and secured all the limelight at Sudden Jerk.

"Y'r Excellen-say," said de la Touche, "I re-mem-bah a rather peculiah occurrence that happened me Avhile coming up from Lake Lefroy toAvards Widgemool-ah. I had been twelve how-ahs without wat-ah—"

"Twelve 'ours!" grunted Tony; "I been three days."

"Well, how-evah, I was twelve how-ahs, and in very bad case. Suddenly I came to a des-ert-ahed camp with a four hundred gallon tank at the corn-ah to collect the wat-ah from the roof. I ah—dismount-ahed and examined the interi-ah of the tank through the manhole. There was but two inches of wat-ah in the bottom of the tank. I had no vessel or pannikin or quart pot, and if I had such it would have been useless owing to the shallow state of the wat-ah. I therefore decided to ent-ah the interi-ah, which I did by the manhole. I had a drink, which was delicious; though three rath-ah ah—grouchy hornets disputed the tank with me. I was just about to leave the tank when the bally—beg pardon—firm-ah-ment was darkened. My horse in the direness of his thirst had put his head through the manhole, and was now unable to withdraw it. I tried for an hour sweating inside

the tank: the atmosphere had become unpleasantly sultry, the horse was breathing into my e-ar with a loud and whistling sound, and the three grouchy hornets stung me till they could sting

no mo-ah."

"Deah! Deah!" said Dyke A eland, &c. "How very ah-unpleasant!"

"Why didn't y' stick y'r knife in his nose?" demanded Tony, in a voice full of unbelief; "'n the pain 'ld make him pull out."

"I had left my sheath knife in the pack. I had but a small pen-knife, which I use as a— ah— mani-cu-ah, and in any case the horse's head was fixed in the manhole. The position was extremely dis-enjoyable; my eyes were swollen by the stings of the hornets, which were now *hors de combat*."

"Y' said the horse wasn't in the tank at all," interrupted Tony, seeing the limelight quite gone away from him.

"I mean the hornets were out of the fight and dying. His Excellen-say understands."

"Meanin' I'm too ignorant," said Tony. "Why, what was you? When you first came here, a sore-foot immigrant, did y' know the difference between quartz an' di'rite? Could y' run a condenser till I showed y'—"

"My dear chap," said de la Touche, "I do not mean anything of the kind. Everybody knows how good you've been."

"Everaybody, Ai'm shuah, Mistah Basteel," supplemented the Governor, and Tony allowed himself to be flattered into silence, though still unconvinced.

"Well, the hornets were hors— I mean, dying; the horse's head was immovahble, and I was suffocating. In my great distress I adopted a desperate measure of cu-ah. I was almost drowned by the blood resulting and the operation was horrible, but at last the horse's head fell into the tank, his body fell outside, and I emerged, almost dying, but safe."

"What did y' do? No flamin' lies. What?"

"I cut the horse's head off, Ton-ay."

"With what? Your teeth?"

"No; with the little penknife I use as a— a mani-cuah!"

"Most interesting— most interesting, indeed!" said Dyke Acland, &c.; but Tony Basteel regarded de la Touche with an air of suspicion and dislike.

"Dam funny y' never skited about that before," he said. "Gen'ral rule, y' can't keep anything to yerself as long as a leatherhead can stop squeakin'. Now, I had somethin' happen t' me at Tibooburra in eighty-four, an—"

Mrs Basteel opened the door and brought in the tea-tray. "Bring them scones off the stove. Tony," she said— and spoiled the story.

The Governor emphasised his attitude of a good King visiting his subjects: of a beneficent monarch acting the part of father of his people. A gentleman all through, he gave Mrs Tony the treatment prescribed by custom for ailing

duchesses; and Mrs Tony, being a real woman, responded to the homage, which was more of demeanor than of words.

And so His Excellency, as de la Touche styled him, drank his tea and asked for a third scone.

"You cook beautifull-ay, Mrs Basteel," he said. "The scones are simply de-lis-e-us." Tony Basteel lifted his head again; some of the limelight was returning, and it was so pleasant to Mrs Tony that she hesitated to say that she had not made the scones, and was immediately lost in a tacit lie. But Tony welcomed it.

"That's right, Gov'nor," said Tony. "The missus ain't much to look at, but, by cripes, she can lick any other woman's 'ead off makin' scones."

"Indeed, they are simply delis-e-us.' Ai have nevah tasted such scones any-whah in Australy-ah. They remind me of the scones a de-ah old nurse of mine used to make in Berksher before Ai went to Injure."

"Went to what?"

"To Injure— Calcutt-ah. But these are the best scones I have ev-ah had since then."

"Yes, your Excellency," said de la Touche, butting in as usual quite innocently, and only in the interests of the sacred truth. "I brought them from Snooks, the baker's, at Golden Cape this morning."

Mrs Basteel crimsoned with shame and went out. Tony glared at his mate, the Governor opened his mouth and closed it again, like a fish dying of air, and the Aide said, "Indeed! Indeed! What?" Then de la Touche saw what he had done and babbled excuses and withdrawals; but even the Governor's geniality was at fault. They made their adieus as soon as decency permitted, and the house at Sudden Jerk was left to the Basteels and de la Touche. Tony went silently to the mill office, and Mrs Basteel ran to warn de la Touche.

"You know what Tony is! Been on the water waggon six months, and now you started him again. You clear before he comes back. We don't want dead bodies around here."

So Egbert de la Touche, his movements quickened by the thought of dead bodies, went to the stable, and the big bay and the jinker took him to Golden Cape and thence down the railroad; until his mate should again be on the water waggon, and the quarrel over-past.

Meanwhile a wild man of the bush, with a bottle of whisky in him, raged into Golden Cape and demanded the body of Egbert, dead or alive.

"I find him a sorefoot pommy, an' I give him a charnst an' make money for him, and then he bites me hand, tellin' the flamin' lord the flamin' scones is made at the flamin' baker's. The flamin' wife can make flamin' scones with any ole nurse in Berkshers or Injure eether. He tells flamin' lies about cuttin' off flamin' 'orse's 'eads with toofpicks, an' I don't give 'im away f'r a flamin' liar; and then when me poor missus is thankin' he's lordship for bein' kind the flamin' Englisher butts in an'

says he bought the flamin' scones from the baker's. O-oh, just let me get Egbert, an' I'll cut his head off with me finger nails, better'n he ever cut off a 'orse's head with a toofpick.... Me poor missus, she can make the best flamin' scones in the flamin' world!"

Then the whisky turned another corner, and Tony Basteel shed bitter tears.

His Excellency Dyke Acland, &c., in deprecating developments to his Aide, said:

"It was unfortunate that Ai mentioned the bally scones. They were indeed verray ordinaray, but Ai had to be kaind."

It was Dante who doomed batterers to a river of filth, but no particularly terrible hell was reserved for vanity; probably because it is the one passion that finds expression after death in the splendor of the funeral.

For Buttinskis the punishment seems to be flight from Golden Cape with great velocity, until Tony Basteel is again on the water waggon.

12: Terror By Night

Evelyn Everett-Green

1856-1932

Weekly Times (Melbourne), 6 June 1914

THE GIRL CROUCHED low in the shadows of the laboratory, an awful fear in her eyes. She felt as though the mad hammering of her heart must be resounding through the echoing place— as though it must betray her presence there. She crouched like a wild thing pursued, where the shadows fell deepest, her wild, white face showing like an oval plaque in the dimness. But her presence there remained quite unknown and unsuspected by the three men who occupied the lighted space in the middle of the large bare room, with its various mechanical contrivances, its slate-covered tables, its shelves containing books, jars, retorts, test tubes— all those objects so familiar to Joyce's eyes— which it was her pride and pleasure to keep in order, leaving her father all his time for carrying on his researches, and doing that more lucrative work which from time to time was put in his way.

Professor Jenvey occupied his usual chair— a straight, high-backed, strongly made piece of furniture, as steady as the heavy table at which he habitually sat, and before which he was seated now. When Joyce had first stolen on tip-toe into the room, she had for the moment noticed nothing strange in her father's aspect; though she was curious about the two men who stood one on either side of him.

Then suddenly she saw that he was firmly tied down in his chair. On either side of him stood a man, and each man was drawing tight and fastening the knots of the ropes. The girl crouching in the shadows saw a pistol lying on the table, and beside the pistol some mufflings. She believed that these mufflings had been flung over her father's head to stifle any shouts for help which he might have set up. Had she not been awakened from sleep by fancying that she heard some unwonted sound proceeding from the garden? She had sat up in bed, and then she had become uneasy. Her father's laboratory lay a short distance from the house, joined to it by a covered way. Their two old servants, both of them women, slept on the far side of the house, overlooking the lane. She and her father preferred the rooms with the garden aspect. But now and again Joyce used to experience qualms of uneasiness. They were so far away from any other house, if anything were to happen! The old Manor was near to be sure; but it seemed never to be inhabited. They had lived three years in their present abode, and not once had the owner been seen by them. He was away travelling, the people said; but he had always promised to come and live amongst them some day—when he was ready to marry and settle.

And now the terrible thing which in her anxious moments she had occasionally dreamt of had come to pass!

She had heard strange sounds in the laboratory as she sat up in bed. Hastily, and in great anxiety, she had dressed herself and stolen down. She was not afraid of darkness. She knew every step along the passage. The door at the end was shut, but it was never locked till her father left the place and returned to the house. She knew how to open it noiselessly. She heard voices and strange scuffling sounds within. Once she almost cried her father's name aloud; but her voice was not under control. It died away in her throat. Next moment she was glad. It was better that she should enter silently, and see what was happening. If indeed there were evilly-disposed men here— in her father's room!

She slipped in like a wraith, and crouched low in the shadows. Her father and two strange men occupied the lighted space in the middle of the room. Just for a moment she did not see what they were about. When she did, it was all she could do to restrain a cry of horror.

They were burglars! They had heard rumors— whispers— of what her father's work sometimes was. They had come to rob him!

Shaking all over in her terror, held rigid and motionless by a panic of fear, the girl heard every word of the following dialogue:

"Now, mister, we've got you all safe and we want everything pleasant like and comfortable. We don't want to make trouble if it can be helped. But we've come for the Mounshire pearls— and we mean to have 'em. The Duchess herself left them here yesterday. You've got them somewhere her safe enough. We know that. And all we want to know is where they are. Save us the trouble of a search, and we'll do no hurt to you nor your property. Come now!"

Joyce could just see the line of her father's profile, the grimly set lips, the resolute pose of the head.

"You had better look for yourselves if you know so much about it."

Angry objurgations were muttered by both men. One took up the pistol and toyed significantly with it.

"Oh! you can shoot me, if you choose. I know that perfectly. But that will rouse the house, and perhaps the neighborhood. You are very anxious that I shall not make any noise. But your pistol will carry a great deal further than my voice could do." Joyce knew perfectly well that no shout from her father would be likely to carry far. He had been hoarse for some days with a cold. Also she realised instantly that he had forbore any attempt to summon help out of fear for her, his daughter. Had she come running hastily into this place, what might have befallen her? But she must listen to what was passing.

"Now, look here, mister," spoke the second ruffian, "none of your bluff, for we won't stand it. This little game is in our hands, and we hold the winning cards. It's scarce midnight yet. We've all the night before us to search; and d'you think we can't find the bloomin' pearls? We're out for 'em, and we'll have 'em, too. But if you'll tell us where they are, we'll do you no harm, nor your place either. But if

you sit there defying us, we'll ransack the whole place; we'll de-stroy everything in it, and we'll set it alight before we go— and you sitting there in the middle. Now take your choice!"

Joyce, in the shadows, suddenly and swiftly stood up. Her face was even whiter than before; but her body had grown suddenly tense, as though every nerve and muscle were turned to steel.

Silently as she had glided in she glided out again. Next moment she was running full speed along the country lane, as Atalanta might have run, skimming the ground with feet which scarcely seemed to touch it; heading for a bulked mass of buildings some half-mile away where was the greatest hope of finding aid.

Useless to appeal to sleepy cottagers, without arms, without initiative, slow in their thoughts, slow in their actions, and with wives who might seek to hold them back from peril.

But at the Manor House, there must be somebody living, even if the owner were away. There would be firearms in that house, and Joyce could load and fire a gun. She had done so be-fore this. Or a gamekeeper might possibly be met with a loaded piece on his shoulder, watching for poach-ers at this season of the year. Oh, blessed hope! If only she could meet a keeper!

What was that? Something black and bounding. A dog raised his voice and barked fiercely. But Joyce had never feared a dog yet. She called to him eagerly, breathlessly.

"Oh, good fellow, good fellow; come here! Show me where is your master! Take me to your master! Oh, good dog, good dog—"

"I am the dog's master! Can I do anything for you?"

Out from a belt of densest shadow a tall figure stepped. Joyce uttered a cry of relief almost like a sob. For the man was tall, was strongly built, and over his shoulder he carried a gun! It was as she had scarcely dared to hope. She had chanced upon one of the Manor keepers !

"Oh, if you would only come! My father! There are burglars in his la-boratory. They have tied him in his chair. They threaten him! Oh, come, come— come and save him! I have always so feared it would happen— some day. I know that he had fears himself. He does not like people to bring these things to him. He knows it is not safe. It ought always to be done through his London agent, so that nothing can be known of it."

She spoke pantingly, brokenly; and the man was striding along beside her so swiftly that he kept up with her running steps, which faltered a little now and again through her fatigue and lack of breath.

"Take my hand," he said, "you are almost done up. But you must come to show me the way. I have not the least idea what you are talking about, though I'd like to know before we get there, if you can tell me."

"It is my father— Professor Jenvey— you know he lives here."

"Yes, I know. He experiments and makes discoveries—"

"Yes, yes. But that is so expensive, and we are not rich, and some of his experiments are costly. He has other work besides."

"Yes?"

"He has a secret of his own. It was his own discovery. He makes an invisible setting for jewels. They look most beautiful in it; for you only really see the jewel itself. And people who want that sort of work done send their jewels to father. He will only take a few, when he needs money. It is not the work he really cares about; but it brings grist to the mill. He has a safe place for hiding them in his laboratory. Even I do not know where it is. But he does not like having anything valuable brought to him. He always knows that that doubles the risk. But sometimes people will. Two days ago the Duchess of Mountshire came with some wonderful pearls. And they are there now— in that place."

"With burglars on the track of them? Yes, that is likely enough. Jewel robberies are all the rage now—and the daring of the blackguards!"

"Yes, yes; and they must have got in very quietly and sprung upon father from behind. But, any way, they were two to one. And if I had not had my window open, and been a very light sleeper—"

"You woke up? And what did you do then?"

"I went down into the laboratory, oh! very softly. Nobody heard me. And they had father tied to his chair, and were trying to make him tell where the jewels were."

"They were not injuring him?"

Joyce heard the grit of the teeth upon the words, and her heart leaped in response to the throb she felt rising in her companion's heart, the throb of indignant sympathy and keen anger.

"Not then, not then—but, oh! the things they said! That they would fire the place, and leave him there when they left—"

"Men threaten more than they dare perform very often," spoke her companion. "But we shall be in time to stop all that. I and my dog will be a match for the pair. Show me the place, and the way to get in, and then run yourself into the house. It may not be a pretty scene that follows."

Suddenly Joyce awoke to a conviction which had been silently growing within her whilst this man swung along at her side. She spoke it quickly.

"You are not a gamekeeper!"

"Well, I was out on a gamekeeper's job tonight. But I am Roger Amhurst, just come back in my Wandering Jew fashion to see how the world is wagging here."

"The young Squire?"

"So-called in these parts still, I suppose. Young enough anyhow to give a good account of myself when it comes to a tussle with a pair of rascals. A fellow who doesn't miss when he shoots, at least."

Joyce's voice broke upon a little sob of relief. "Oh, how can I thank you! How can—"

"We'll talk of all that another time. But here we are at the place. Not a sound; not a word. Creep back as you crept forth, and show me the way. Then make yourself scarce. Rock and I will settle the business."

It was wonderful how that man moved, with what absolute silence, and the dog imitated him in a marvellous manner. Joyce felt that even her ghost-like movements were noisy compared with theirs.

The lights from the laboratory shone out. She heard sounds of tapping and smothered execrations and oaths. When Roger Amhurst slid into the crack of light within the door she had so cautiously opened, she saw a strong face set in stern lines, and dark eyes flaming beneath the crest of hair from which the peaked cap was a little pushed back.

Slowly and silently he raised his gun to his shoulder. The two men were close together, crouching over a place in the floor, where they were trying to prise up a board. They were so deeply absorbed that they did not hear the stealthy step into the room. Indeed, there were two persons stepping across the floor towards the man bound helpless in the chair, for Joyce had disobeyed the command laid upon her. She followed close upon the steps of the man with the gun, and with a stealthy, cat-like motion she dived beneath his arm and possessed herself of the cocked pistol which still lay upon the table where she had seen it before.

Roger Amhurst's eyes flashed upon her as he saw the act. She put her finger to her lips— and smiled. Plain as words he read the signal in her eyes.

"I can shoot, too!"

Then his voice ran through the room. "Hands up— or I fire! My charge will do for the pair of you!"

"Hands up— or I fire!" came the echo in a clear, girlish voice. "I have two charges for anyone who wants them!"

The ruffians swung round. They looked down the barrel of a shot-gun, levelled upon them by a man whose stern face was backing enough for his words: looked at the pistol so firmly held by a girl standing at his side, whose eyes shot sparks of fire, and whose hand was as steady as his. They looked also at the rigid form of a great black dog, who was bristling from crest to tail, and whose low, fierce, rumbling growl seemed to echo words spoken by the human beings.

"Hands up this instant!"

Roger had seen the stealthy movement of one of the men— the one who kept his pistol still upon him.

Up went two pair of hands. There was no standing against those two barrels and that dog.

"Miss Jenvey, can you cut your father free while I and Rock hold up these villains? There is a sharp knife in my pocket."

Next moment Professor Jenvey stood free, stretching his cramped limbs, and looking quietly at the cowed men who had erstwhile been so bold.

"If you will just relieve the left-hand gentleman of the little toy he carries, we will march them off to the police station," said Roger. "They have been considerate enough to bring plenty of cord with them. We shall not waste time in searching for that. Thank you, sir. Now, if you and your daughter will hold the pistols in position, I will do the trussing up. Not for the first time, either. And let me tell you, my friends, that at a sign of resistance I give the word to fire, and the word to my dog, whose teeth will break a bone if once he catches hold."

In a trice the men's arms were pinioned to their sides. Their feet were cleverly hobbled, so that although they could walk, there was not a chance for them to break away and run. Roger coolly ransacked their pockets for any tools or knives which might be there, and gathered up the lot to place with those found about the room.

"They did not get what they came for, sir, I suppose?"

"Oh dear no. Never were near it! They showed themselves singularly lacking in imagination. It was amusing to watch their futile efforts. But I was not sorry when the entertainment ended," and the professor held out his hand to his rescuer. "I thank you, sir, though I do not know whom I am thanking."

"It is your daughter's pluck and swiftness you really have to thank, and that cool courage which kept her here beside me when I had told her to go. It was not woman's work. But two barrels were better than one, and saved me from having to fire. Now, if you please, I will walk off these gentlemen to the constable's cottage, and he shall settle how we deal with them."

"I shall go with you, sir—"

"Father, it is Mr Amhurst— whom they call the young Squire."

"Then, Mr Amhurst, I will go with you. It will relieve my cramped limbs to have a walk—"

"And I must go, too; for I daren't be left alone," said Joyce. "Mr Amhurst, if you could see inside of me you would call me a coward, and not brave. I never felt less brave in all my life!"

"Well, if you are brave when danger threatens and others would turn tail and bolt, you can be a coward quite comfortably all the rest of your life."

IT WAS WHEN the birds were carolling their hearts out in the sweet springtide that Professor Jenvey drew his daughter toward him one day and said, "Joyce, my darling, do you know that Roger is telling me is a coward, now?"

"Daddy! Roger? What can you mean?"

"You see, my dear, there is some question he badly wants to ask you— and yet he is afraid!"

"Oh, daddy!"

"Because, you see, my child, he knows that you always feel how much we owe him— because on that night of terror he saved my life— and, perhaps, yours, too."

"Mine, daddy— how?"

"Because, my dear, both Roger and I know very well that had you failed in getting help that night you would have flown back to your old father, and have died with him or for him sooner than—"

"Daddy, don't let's talk of that awful night. In my dreams it sometimes comes back, but Roger's face always sends it flying."

"Yes, we both feel that we could not spare Roger now. Well, there is one thing which will keep him here and stop his wanderings, only he is afraid to ask for it, lest it should be given to him, not for his own sake but because of the service he rendered. There, little girl, I have told you what a coward this Roger is— to be afraid of a little baggage like you! Now run off and find him, for he is somewhere about, and leave me to my work, which he interrupts so terribly just now."

With a glowing face and shining eyes, Joyce ran forth into the garden, where the cuckoo was shouting his love-note and the air was full of the sounds and scents of spring. There he was pacing the bowling-green, and at sight of her he wheeled round and looked into her face. Then he took two strides forward and opened his arms— those strong arms which for so long now seemed to stand for a symbol of the man's strength and courage. Joyce went straight into them, like a homing bird to its nest. They folded round her, and she gasped at the strength of that clasp.

"Oh, Roger, how strong you are!"

"If I am strong, it is because my love is strong. Joyce, Joyce, can you love me back? I am such a great, rough fellow, and I have been afraid to ask such a thing of you."

"Afraid! You? Oh, Roger, and I have never been afraid of anything since you came into my life, because, you know, love casts out fear. And I have loved you ever since that terrible night."

"And I never guessed it— never knew it!"

Closely her arms clasped round his neck. Her lips sought his.

"You know it now," she said.

13: The Living and the Others

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 3 Jan 1918

I HAD BEEN CHIEF MOURNER at my own funeral. I had wept by my grave side. There under a small-mound of stones I lay, my resting place marked with a little dead bracken loosely scattered over the fresh-made grave to hide it from the eye of any curious chance wanderer in those solitudes, and down the slope of Little Mount Long, his pick on his shoulder, went a live man, skulking among his turkeys, sweating with fear, yet hugging a sick joy bred of the hope that now he had disposed of his enemy for good and all.

He is a strange man to look upon, this turkey-herd, with his longish, lean legs and short, somewhat misshapen body, his narrow face of such exaggerated length that the chin lies habitually on his chest, his complexion like the inside of a sun-dried lambskin, and his hair that was once dark, but is now the hue of scorched grass, the result of daily hatless ex-cursions on the bleak, or blazing, hills with his herd of mournful birds.

According to accepted ethics, the poor wretch was quite justified in killing me; but he was a simple soul, no more subtle than the turkeys he herded, and lacked the perspicacity to put the matter in that light to the ghost that haunted him.

Besides nobody argues with ghosts. There is too great a respect for ghosts. If people realised that the spirit plaguing them is in all probability nothing more than a snivelling waif, divided from humanity only because of its inability to incorporate itself with material things, miserably, heltlessly drifting about familiar associations as a foolish cat goes meowing around a burnt house, they would meet the wraith in a rational temper, and something really helpful might be the outcome. But the senseless fear of death has bred this insane dread of the thing beyond death— the deathless thing.

I wished the turkey-herd no ill until he discovered his intention of burying me away from the world. It was thus he hoped to rid himself of the spook besetting him. There is that belief among men. While the body lies tainting the air the restless spirit will walk the earth. Curiously enough, there was in my case some truth in this seemingly absurd supposition. I hated the thought of being buried. It threw me into a curious state of flurried excitement. I felt passionately resentful; but my anger was accompanied by a more than childish impotence, and now that all was over, I sat on a rounded stone and wept; while Weegull went off in the morning mists among the huge boulders, gathering his turkeys about him, cowering among them as if to so hide his identity or to share out his guilt.

The day was almost upon us. I sat there, gazing with non-existent eyes at my poor grave, weeping immaterial tears, feeling all the pangs of the flesh where no

flesh was. A man who has lost a leg may be troubled by the aches of an old corn or the twinges of his familiar gout. A ghost, it would appear, retains, for some time, at any rate, in a similar vague way the sensations of his discarded flesh. But I knew my loss; I longed for my body; I would not let it lie there in the earth to rot. I merely waited, with sly caution till Weegull should be gone.

Suddenly, as I gazed I felt the presence of a new danger. A great, grey beast came slinking between the boulders, a wraith himself in the dull light of the new day. He stretched his nose and sniffed the air, then went forward, snout to the ground, smelling his way. He came to the grave and pushed his muzzle among the earth, and with a powerful paw raked a stone away.

The brute was a wild dog, mastiff-like, one of a number in the hills, escaped from domesticity and returned almost to the wolf. He clawed again, and thrust his nose into the hole, sniffing eagerly. I attempted to use the absent organs of articulation in a cry; I snatched at a stone; but ghostly cries are inaudible, ghostly fingers do, not grasp material things. I stood over the beast, whimpering foolishly for quite a minute, while he scratched at the shallow grave.

Then came the consciousness of my new power, and I laughed as heartily as a poor ghost may. The force I exerted was not unnatural (there are no unnatural forces— there are no unnatural laws), but it came from no source compatible with the dog's instinct. At first, feeling the strain on his hindquarters, he turned and snapped viciously, and endeavoured to re-sume his digging. Again I drew at him, and again he snapped back right and left. I drew him further and further away. He fought with terrific ferocity, snatching furiously at the thin air, tumbling and rolling in the dirt, biting himself in his passion, tearing his lean flanks, contending with the unseen in a proxysm of ungovernable rage.

Only when on the point of exhaustion did the dog yield, and then he lifted himself painfully on his quavering legs, and stood a moment with heaving sides flecked with froth, bleeding from a dozen wounds, his fangs bared in a hideous snarl, his eyes rolling from side to side, seeding his enemy. He limped away, still snarling, looking to this side and that, and was lost to view among the boulders.

I went to the grave, and sucked the stones from their setting. I scattered the loose earth, and drew my body from the hole, couching it upon the bracken in the full light of day. Crouched by it, I peered into the pale face with a sort of mothering love. I yearned over my own poor flesh, fondly protective. A rust of hair had grown on the chin and thin cheeks in the last few hours; there was much dirt in the long dark hair, and above the temple a broken wound, black with clotted blood, stood out like a symbol.

A quavering cry interrupted me. Weegul had come back. He was standing off from the corpse, looking down at it in terrible amazement, his almost toothless mouth open, his twitching eyebrows lifted into his wrinkled forehead, his hands clawing against his breast. Presently he began to speak, but only to utter the

words, "God!" and "Christ!" in frantic whispers. His turkeys stood about him, the sleepy birds making no sound, but craning their necks foolishly, an occasional bird lifting his wings with a curious hint of dull weariness that was almost a yawn.

So the sun found them, falling first on the dead man where he lay, lighting up his palor, making play on the black brand seeming to glide into his thick hair.

"He's up from his grave!" said Weegull. "He's raised hisself. My God ! he's raised his-self." He lifted clenched hands to heaven, and in this attitude he advanced slowly, as if fascinated by his own terrors, the ungainly birds at his heels craning their thin necks after him.

Tommy Weegull bent to the body, and let one hand fall gingerly upon it.

"Dead!" he whispered. "Oh, he's dead— he's quite dead!"

His eye encountered a paw print in the broken soil. He went upon his knees, peering at the tracks, following them up, his nose almost in the dirt. He arose in an ecstasy, capering like a child.

"Dogs!" he said. "Dogs! Dogs! Dogs!" He made a sort of song of it. His turkeys moved sedately aside, repudiating, his foolish levity. "Dogs! dogs! dogs!" Tommy chortled. He had found an explanation of the disinterment that was simple and natural, one that left open to him still a chance of escaping from his recent terrors, and his sudden glee was apeish, yet pitiful.

"We'll bury him deep," he said. "Very deep. We'll pile stones on him to keep him down— big stones. We'll fill his grave with 'em. So many, he'll never comes up again.

Weegull went to the grave, and set to work within it. He toiled upon his knees, using the short pick with extraordinary vigour, clawing the dirt and stones away with his calloused fingers. From a distance I watched him at his strange task, feeling again a fever of trepidation for the fate of my bones, forgetful again for the moment of the force at my command.

The sun hung above Eagle Head, deluging the valley in hot light, and Tommy Weegull had disappeared in the grave he was digging with fearful industry, I saw only the dirt and stones spring up as he threw them from the excavation. Meanwhile the turkeys stood scattered among the boulders, brooding drowsily making no attempt to find sustenance on that arid patch, uttering no sound, yet in some strange way suggesting an eerie sympathy with the digger.

Tommy came up from the grave. He had almost forgotten his terrors in the violence of his energy. He was drenched with perspiration. Pausing not for a moment he ran to and fro, bearing large stones to the edge of the excavation, and piling them there.

Now my murderer was prepared for me. He paused for a moment on hands and knees, gazing at the body. Compunction grew in his face. He looked piteously on trees and sky, seeking a god for the prayer in his heart, and then he crept

nearer, and laid a hand on the dead man that was I. I fought with him, holding the slim corpse with superhuman power.

Weegull put forth his strength, and sought to drag the body to him. I resisted with scarcely an effort, and Tommy tried again, putting all his strength into the endeavour. Surprise and consternation sprang into his eyes, and he drew away a moment to rest himself, breathing deeply, staring fixedly at the dead, cold terror creeping back into his heart. I was five feet eight inches only, and lightly built; the turkey-herd had the strength of a fatless athlete, toughened by a hard, open-air life on the steep hills and the exercise of primitive tillage. He rested a full two minutes, and then, taking the body by both angles, he pulled with a steady strain. There was no responsive movement. It was as if all the strength had gone from his limbs, or the weight of the great, grey granite boulders had been given to the dead thing in his hands.

With dry tongue Weegull sought to moisten his cracked lips, and a fearful greyness stole through the tan of his streaming face. Once more he tried to move the body. Again he failed, and, springing to his feet with an anguished cry, he faced the situation in a flare of utter desperation. Standing across the prone figure of William Clint, he grappled it about the waist, and lifted with all his might. I put my force against him, and he failed. A riot of madness seized him, and he struggled ferociously with the dead thing, tearing at it with his iron fingers, blaspheming in a low voice, the blood flowing down his chin from deeply-bitten lips, every thew showing sharply in his tense arms and his rigid neck.

Again he failed to shift the body, and in his wild fury he fell upon it, and taking the dead man's throat in his two hands, he put all that was in him into a frantic endeavour to choke out of the body the uncanny life with which he believed it still to be invested. The murderer was seeking to slay his victim yet again.

I threw my power against him, and forced Weegull to his feet and back from his victim, step by step. He fought me all the way, struggling as if with a tangible foe, straining himself till the blood sprang from his muscles, and cursing all the time in a barking, bestial way. It was only a repetition of the struggle with the wild dog; the man was as blind, he was as irrational. He tore at his clothing, he lacerated his own skin, and from his throat welled guttural sounds of fury such as any brute might make fighting for its life.

Straining forward towards the corpse, Weegull was urged away, striving distractedly till he floundered into the open grave. He no longer resisted, but lay where he had fallen, shrunken together at the bottom of the hole, a quivering, shapeless thing.

I watched, and Weegull grovelled there for many minutes. Presently he appeared from the ground again, peering towards the body. He drew himself out of the hole, and scrambled away, going some yards on hands and knees. Rising to his feet, he fled, with an arm hiding his face, and the turkeys, grouping together,

flowed after him, with the mincing gait of dancers, but still impassable and genteel.

There was a fear that he might return, and I stayed with my dead. Did ever another ghost employ itself as I did during the following hours? I was infused with a pitiful longing to return into my flesh, to feel again the stability of my bones, to have the warmth of blood and the sensations of the body. Have you ever seen a small bird, bred in captivity released from its cage, struggling to get back into its barred prison, fluttering in an agony of apprehension from one side to the other, desisting only when beaten into helplessness by its vain efforts? So I strove about my body, seeking ingress, woefully eager to regain mortality. So I failed. There was no response to my appeal, no way, no hope.

It was an hour after noon when I drifted away down the side of Little Mt. Long, drawn back to humanity.

As I went through the boulders and warped trees like crutchless cripples, a sudden shower struck the range-side, veiling the sun, and setting a vivid rainbow astride the valley. The rain was not more than enough to drench the trees, and start the lichen-covered boulders steaming, veiling the near distances in a faint purple vapour.

I came on him unexpectedly. The vision was a curious one. He hung, as it were, silhouetted under the arch of glory, something of the rain-bow's tints filtered into the mists about him— a queer, misshapen object dangling by the neck from the limb of a sprawling gum, suspended on his own waist belt.

On the flinty soil a large flock of turkeys gathered, lifting weary wings, making occasional low, guttural complaints, but loyally awaiting the pleasure of Tommy Weegull, permanently up a tree.

14: The Exorcism of Platt's Spook

Edward Dyson

Punch (Melbourne) 2 June 1910

PLATT HAD BEEN A SAILOR, and many things in his day, and now he was a farmer. From ploughing the briny to running furrows in rocky soil with a stump-jumper is a considerable change. Platt felt it.

Naturally a rover, he was not long in discovering the disadvantages of going on the land and leg-roping oneself to the farm fixtures. Platt had a wife, too, and the beginnings of a family. These were further anchors holding Platt to his patch of real estate, when his soaring soul was far away in the business of running secret cargoes of cheap Chinamen into ports where cheap Chinese are strictly forbidden.

Andy Platt's farm was in a rather dismal distance, too, edging on to Dim Distance, in Gippsland, far from the smell of the sea, and removed from all congenial society. After two years of Loongabbie, Andy concluded that this existence was not worth living, and took a few days off to secure a liberal insurance on his life.

Platt insured for £7000, which goes to prove that he had a decent desire to provide for his wife and his little daughter. In fact, Andy was rather fond of his wife. Etta was eighteen years younger than he, and a romantic and excitable female, almost as useful on a farm as a blue cow would be in a balloon.

Take a sailor with the spirit of a buccaneer and a city wife with a taste for sentimental literature and a strong belief in spiritualism, and you have just about the worst possible combination for an agricultural layout.

The discovery of this simple fact aggravated Platt's gloom, and his wife and the few easy and accessible neighbours noticed the change in him. He grew morose and uncommunicative. The failure of his efforts to sell the farm was an occasion for deeper despondency.

At this stage Andy Platt developed a curious taste. He would neglect his work to tramp out to the foot of Big Ben for the mere gratification of staring by the hour into the Devil's Bowl.

The Devil's Bowl was a big depression covering about an acre, a curious bog of seething black mud that worked ceaselessly, like some hellish ferment, the bottom of which had not been found, even with a cwt. lead plummet and half a mile of fencing wire.

Any article thrown into the Devil's Bowl speedily disappeared; animals that bogged in it, were swallowed up, and went, down into the vast, mysterious, clammy bowels of the universe.

Andy Platt would stand on the bank, gazing gloomily at the black stirring horror, like a man possessed with devils. It seemed as if the slow-working, evil thing had hypnotised him.

Mrs Platt was warned, but she only wept dolorously. Henrietta was no woman for a dire emergency.

Andy Platt's disappearance surprised nobody. Crowther and Hughes declared that they knew him to be doomed. The Devil's Bowl had drawn others to it. McIntyre, the old hatter from Crowbar, had been enticed by its malevolent influence in the same way; so had Jessie Rowe, who walked into the hell broth one night, with her baby in her arms, and was never beheld of mortal eyes again.

They found, as they had expected, tracks of Andy to the bank, and various articles of wearing apparel, a hat, and a pair of boots known to be Platt's, on the edge of the black bog, and in one of the boots a note, which read:

It has got me. It's been calling me night and day for months. It tugged at me always, drawing me in. I can fight no longer.

Goodbye.

Andrew Platt.

For a time nothing could be got out of the one witness, a lame shepherd, who was frantic with fear, but who subsequently deposed that he had seen the figure of a man in the mud. The top of the head and the wild, dead eyes stood out of the sucking, seething mud, and one rigid hand pointed to the sky.

Mrs Platt was terribly shocked; the blow prostrated her for over a month, and then she, too, contracted so great a horror of the Devil's Bowl that it became necessary to take her right away from Loongabbie.

Hughes was of the opinion that if she had not gone the black bog would have got her too. Fortunately the seven thousand pounds the insurance society paid over after a few months of dubiety raised Mrs Platt and her little girl above want. The farm had been sold at a sacrifice, and now the widow was very much more at her ease in a pretty suburban villa planted in a large garden at Kew.

THREE YEARS passed, and little Mrs Platt had almost forgotten the horror at Loongabbie, and thought she had ceased to fear it, despite her spiritualistic beliefs, when one night she awoke, feeling that she had been called. For a moment she lay still, trembling and apprehensive, and then distinctly she heard the call: "Etta! Etta!"

Mrs Platt recognised the voice. It was Andy's.

Slowly she raised herself, slowly she turned. Yes, there it stood by the window, the moonlight full upon it— the figure of her dead husband.

"Etta!" He was speaking, but Mrs Platt did not give herself time to distinguish the words. From her labouring breast burst an agonised shriek that seemed almost to tear her heart out. Screaming, she threw herself from the bed, and screaming she rushed from, her room into that of the servant's.

When the neighbours, attracted by the noise, came running sleepily, there was no sign of the spectre, and the window was closed. Most people have some kind of a sneaking belief in the supernatural; few will admit it, so everybody said that Mrs Platt had been dreaming, and all secretly felt a new awe for the house she lived in, and passed it after night with a sort of chill feeling and hastening footsteps.

The vision came again in almost the same way. This time it plucked at the bed clothes, and the widow felt its hands upon her. Again she shrieked. This time, she said, it held her fast; but she never ceased to scream.

Naturally the neighbours began to talk about Platt's ghost after this. They wondered at the widow's courage in remaining at "Vine Villa," but Henrietta explained: "No matter, where I went it would follow me."

"Don't leave an address," suggested Mrs Glibb, wisely.

"That would make no difference, my dear," said the widow sadly. "A ghost does not look up the Directory when it desires to haunt one. I can never escape him. I know in my heart he is seeking to compel me to join him there deep in the awful depths of the Devil's Bowl, and I'm afraid. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Marry again." The bright idea was Mrs Maclellan's.

"But would that stop him?" murmured Henrietta.

"It would if he had any sense of decency, certainly. No ghost that knew how to behave would want to drag his widow off to rejoin him if he knew she was another's."

"It wouldn't be legal," said Mrs Moore.

"I'll get my husband to speak to a lawyer about it," said Mrs Grey. They were discussing the matter at 4 o'clock tea. Henrietta seemed impressed with the idea. There was something in the notion that appealed to her.

"Perhaps you are right, Mrs Maclellan," she said. "Andrew was always a law-abiding man, and a great respecter of the sanctity of the marriage tie. I shall certainly think it over."

Mrs Platt had occasion to regard the need of a remedy as urgent, for a few days later Andy's spook appeared to her in the grey of the evening in her own summer-house, and again she fled in wild terror. After the fourth appearance the matter got into the papers; it became public property, and crowds gathered, before the villa at night to watch for the ghost. The wildest stories were spread, and scores of people were found willing to swear that they had seen the spectre drifting about the grounds.

This publicity seemed to have scared the ghost, however. Two months passed, and Etta had not seen it; but just as things were quietening down it reappeared, and Mrs Platt fled from her house in her nightdress, frantic with fear apparently. The ghost had penetrated to her bedroom again. It had seized her; she had struggled with it, and broken away and rushed into the night.

This last adventure convinced the widow that she would be wise in accepting Mr Olden, the big stockbroker, who had been endeavouring to rush her into matrimony for quite six months. They were married very quietly, and after a short honeymoon at the Lakes returned and settled down at "Vine Villa."

During the first three months of wedded life nothing occurred to mar their great happiness. It was a rather dark, cold, winter's night when Mrs Olden saw her former husband's ghost for the last time.

She was awakened as usual by a hand upon her shoulder, shaking her sharply. She turned over. He was standing there. She saw and recognised him the faint glow of the night light. He looked down at her, his figure bent as though in sorrow.

This time she did not scream. She knelt up among the bed clothes, and said in a low, distant voice, quite collected and strong.

"Andy, I am getting rather tired of this."

"Are you?" said the ghost. "Not as tired as I am."

"And I want to put an end to it," continued Mrs Olden. "And I want to know what the devil you mean by it," exclaimed the ghost.

"Hush!" Mrs Olden admonished. "My husband will hear you."

"Your what?" gurgled the ghost.

"My husband. He is sleeping just beyond these folding doors."

"You— you've dared to marry again?"

"I had to— to keep off the ghosts."

"This is bigamy. I suppose you know that?"

"Not at all. Spooks do not count."

The ghost seemed greatly distressed. It muttered a few words of a distinctly unghostly character.

"You've done me," said Andy Platt's goblin presently. "You never meant to act square by me."

"Oh, yes, I did— at first."

"Then why the deuce didn't you do as we agreed? Why didn't you join me in South America? Why have you run yelling from me?"

"Well, after a time, when I had got the money, and was feeling comfortable, I concluded that I would not like the climate of Paraguay."

"And what of me?"

"Oh, I was certain I would not like you."

"This is what I've been expecting. For two copper dumps I'd strangle you."

Mrs Olden laughed. "Oh, no, you wouldn't, Andrew," she said. "And don't raise your voice; my husband is a powerful man, and hot tempered."

"I'll tell him all."

"That you are lying dead in the mud in the Devil's Bowl, and I, your rightful widow, am in possession of the £7000 insurance you effected on your life? Don't trouble. He knows."

"But does he know that you were in with me, that you were to join me in America after things had quietened down, and that you have turned dog on me."

"Bless my soul, no. That, of course, is your story— mine would be entirely different. I honestly believed you to be at the bottom of the Devil's Bowl, if it has a bottom. I was quite convinced it was your ghost that made its way into my house. That's my version."

"So that accounts for your running and screaming every time I showed my nose?"

"Of course."

"And you didn't care a curse about the risk of getting me nabbed. I've been dodging and hiding like a criminal."

"Don't forget, Andrew, you are a criminal. You would certainly get ten years for this."

Again the ghost used distinctly unspiritual language. "What do I get out of this, then?"

"I have £500 in a bag locked in a drawer there. Take it, and continue dead, if you are a wise man."

"And if I raise Cain?"

"You'll get ten years and nothing else. I'll divorce you, and re-marry Olden, that is all."

The ghost raised his clenched hands as if about to do murder, but the little woman in the bed did not flinch. "I would rather be a widow," she said sweetly, "than the divorced wife of a convict. Better take the money, and get back to Paraguay, where you may be safe."

"Give me the money," whispered the ghost. Mrs Olden arose, unlocked a drawer in her dressing table, and lifted out a canvas bag.

"There," she said, "and good-bye for ever."

"Good-bye forever," whispered the ghost. As he spoke the words Mrs Olden slid softly to the floor, and lay there very silent and still.

The ghost looked down at her for a moment, stole to the window, opened it, and stepped out into the night.

THEY FOUND Mrs Olden in the morning, dead on the floor, with a knife through her heart. The crime was an absolute mystery to all those who were not sufficiently superstitious to accept the theory that the ghost of her first husband had killed her.

Meanwhile, the dummy, the sight of which had driven the old shepherd half-demented, lay in the mud fathoms deep in the Devil's Bowl at Loongabbie, and there is an ex-sailor and present energetic and prosperous smuggler in a small South American republic, whose resemblance to the late Mrs Olden's first husband is simply amazing.

Andy Platt's little daughter Kate inherits the £7000, a fact which seems to satisfy Platt's ghost, as that remarkable spook has never since been seen.

15: Sanctity of Marriage at Cowford

Ward Edson

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 5 Jan 1911

COWFORD was a Wesleyan community, and prided itself on its high moral standard and its zeal in Sabbath observance. The statistics of Cowford in matters of drunkenness, murder, manslaughter, arson, bigamy, and all the domestic virtues were such as any community might well be proud of.

There was a small, unpainted, hardwood chapel on the hill overlooking the township, with two staring glass eyes full of admonition and reproof. If any resident of Cowford yielded to the promptings of the devil so far as to sally forth at night with, a bag and larcenous intentions in connection with his neighbour's hens, he was certain to find the eyes of the little chapel, reflecting moonlight or starlight, bent upon him with a reproachful glare, and he would retire precipitately, full of contrition, and minus the poultry.

There was no ordained minister at the chapel, but every Cousin Jack is a preacher by instinct, and there was not half-a-dozen Cornishmen in the township unprepared to conduct a service, preach a sermon, deliver a prayer, or sing a hymn at a moment's notice. The Brethren were ministers by rote, and preached and prayed in turn.

Very few people in or about Cowford failed to go to chapel at least once on Sunday, and to prayer meeting every Wednesday night. To neglect these functions was to invite suspicion, and leave oneself open to a charge of infidelity, or a suspicion of Popish sympathies. For the other nights of the week there were Band of Hope meetings, choir practice, and gatherings of the Mothers' Club, an association that aimed to cultivate temperate habits and a distaste for tobacco and opium in the very young.

It will be seen that there was no lack of diversion in Cowford, and no need whatever for public houses, billiard-rooms, smoke socials, and similar inventions of the devil.

Imagine, if you can, the state of public opinion in such a community with regard to a man like Andrew Apps. There were substantial grounds for the belief that Andy was not wholly and completely sober when he arrived at Cowford, and his subsequent conduct was not calculated to allay the common distrust of Cowford towards men who carried swags and lived in tents.

Apps was given three weeks' trial, and in all that time he had not put in an appearance at chapel. He had ignored the prayer meetings, and overlooked the Band of Hope. No doubt remained concerning Andrew Apps— he was a lost soul.

In all respects Andy's conduct was calculated to provoke public distrust, he was not working, and had not sought work; he had no friends, and had made no

advances and put forth no offers of conciliation. Furthermore, Andrew Apps was a prowler.

At first Andy's prowling was general; of late it was all about the home of Mr. Jacob Honesty. Eventually there remained no doubt that Apps's intentions towards the domicile of Jacob were strictly dishonourable.

Apps was a lurker, and Cowford could not abide lurkers, especially lurkers like Apps, who were secret and silent, who provoked common curiosity to a fever heat, and said nothing, and did nothing to allay the irritation. Andrew was often seen lurking in the vicinity of Honesty's house. Brother Best had come upon the man hiding behind a tree, watching Honesty's house with such absorbed intensity that he had not heard himself addressed.

Brother Veal, when out shooting parrots, had discovered the man Apps sitting up a large white gum absorbed in contemplation of Honesty's home.

Everybody had something to say about Andy's prowling propensities, and the leaders of public opinion were convinced that steps should be taken; but, as none knew what sort of steps should be taken, or what direction those steps should take, nothing was done.

Then came something in the nature of a climax. Andy Apps and Jacob Honesty had been seen fighting at the latter's back-door. It was Sister Ann Carter saw the dire conflict. "I jist seen this feller Apps a-creepin' up to Honesty's back-door, and all of a suddink out jumps Jacob, and sorter points him off, me bein' unfortunately not near enough to hear what's said. Apps he ups 'n' replies somethin' what looks like bad langwidge 'n' low abuse. Jacob puts 'ands on him, 'n' there's a fight agin Honesty's back-door, all among the ducks. Blows is 'ammerin' away, ducks is scatterin' wild, 'n' high words is flyin', when Mrs. Honesty jumps out, with a pail of washin'-up in her hands, and swooshes the lot all over both her 'usband 'n' the man Apps, which the latter goes off immejit, wringin' his shirt sleeves, 'n' rubbin' the water out iv his eyes."

It is now apparent that Apps is a lawless villain, prepared to go to any extremes to effect his nefarious purpose, and all the more a scoundrel and a wretch in keeping that purpose secret from a community naturally inquisitive and profoundly concerned with other people's business.

When interviewed, Honesty gave it as his opinion that the man Apps was a little demented. He hoped nothing serious would happen. Twice after that Apps and Honesty were seen fighting in the vicinity of the latter's home, and then .Joseph Praetor arrived right in the middle of a Band of Hope meeting, with a stirring account of an attempt on the part of Andrew Apps to abduct Mrs. Honesty.

Apps, it appears, had seized Mrs. Honesty while she was crossing from the township to her home, and had promptly carried her off.

Mrs. Honesty was a small, slim, dark woman, quite helpless in the hands of a big, powerful man like Apps, and the latter had succeeded in carrying her about a quarter of a mile, when Praetor and Crowther effected a rescue.

Apps, a solemn, silent man, offered no words in answer to the eloquent reproaches of Brother Praetor. He accepted his failure in a philosophic spirit, and retired to his tent.

Apps tried again. He captured Mrs. Honesty in her own garden, took her in his arms, and, despite her kicking and screaming, was calmly carrying her off when Honesty rushed across from his work and waylaid the body-snatcher. Again there was a fight, in which Honesty was somewhat injured. Apps was always willing to fight with Honesty, but towards other men he preserved a peaceful manner and a stubborn taciturnity.

Then, three times in rapid succession Apps made bold attempts to abduct Mrs. Honesty. Once he had the audacity to invade her own kitchen and bear her away from the baking of bread, with dough still on her hands, and the flour she had used as a defence thick upon him. In each instance there was a rescue, but Andy was unabashed, and apparently unshaken in his nefarious purpose.

Brother Peter Best's bright brain here cast a luminous light on the situation.

"The villain's a kidnapper, a bigamist," said Peter. "He has no respect for the Commandments that bid us commit no adultery, nor to covet our neighbour's wife. He is an enemy of the marriage tie, a foe to domestic peace! and the sanctity of the home."

This had seemed apparent for some little time, but Brother Best's manner of putting it made Apps appear a common enemy, a danger to the whole community.

Public feeling at Cowford waxed very hot against Apps. Cowford sentiment was intensely conservative in matters affecting marriage, monogamy, and the domestic circle. Cowford was prepared to die unanimously in defence of these sacred institutions.

Imagination intensified under the influence of Brother Best's eloquence. If Jacob Honesty would take no definite determined action, it was the duty of Cowford to do so in the interests of the home. Cowford could not see wives torn from their homes and carried off under its very nose, and refrain from making an emphatic demonstration of its hatred of such iniquitous goings-on.

It was Apps's daring and absolute contempt of public opinion and common decency that precipitated the general rising. Honesty arrived at Brother Best's door in the wee dark hours one morning, holding up his trousers with one hand, and embracing a huge lump on his head with the other. Apps had broken into his house, bounced a section of fencing material on his occiput, and carried off Mrs. Honesty from her bed.

Brother Best felt that the crucial moment had come. He awoke the town. He led a rescue party, and Apps was captured two miles out on the Burrumbeet road, still carrying his prize.

He was dragged back to Cowford, and tied to the chapel fence. It was felt that, as justice must be done, there was no place like the chapel yard to do it in. Brother Best read the prisoner a long homily on the iniquity of his conduct and the purity of the marriage compact, while Jacob Honesty helped to light the fire and warm the tar. Peter Best, in the warmth of his fervour for righteous living and lawful observance, gave his own feather bed to the cause. Justice was to be vindicated at Cowford; the sacred nature of marriage was to be publicly asserted.

The prisoner remained silent and unconvinced. He was a slow-thinking, mild-eyed type of bushman, and if he had his own opinions refrained from expressing them, recognising, perhaps, that Cowford was against him, and that resistance was useless.

The men formed a ring around the infamous lawbreaker, they put a coat of warm tar all over him, they ripped open Peter's contributed feather bed, and they rolled the tarred sinner in the feathers. Andy Apps stood out in the light of dawn, a tall, ungainly bird, feathered from ears to heels. The men of Cowford pulled the chapel gate off its hinges, they set Apps, the kidnapper, the rifler of homes, the coveter of other men's wives, on the gate, and they rode him through the township amidst great enthusiasm and a clatter of tin-kettles, and Jacob Honesty beat the biggest tin.

Andy Apps was left at his own tent, where Brother Best delivered a final sermon and some excellent advice.

That day Apps left Cowford. Within a week five prominent and fairly well-to-do citizens of Cowford, including Brother Peter Best, received a peremptory lawyer's letter intimating that they were to be sued for heavy damages by Andrew John Apps for grievous, assault and spiteful usage.

The defendants were astonished at Apps's audacity, but had no great fear of the consequences. But four days later the five, backed by a pretty large deputation of men and women of the township, rushed Jacob Honesty, and interviewed him at his own door.

"This wretched fellow— this man Apps," spluttered Brother Best, "declares, we assaulted him without fair and reasonable provocation— that he was encased endeavouring to recover *his own wife*!"

"Well," said Honesty, with some natural diffidence, "I s'pose it would sorter bear that construction."

"But *his own wife*?"

"Yes, his own wife in a manner o' speakin'. Yeh see, I ran away with Mrs. Apps a matter o' seven years ago, 'n' I s'pose Jane's still his wife, as it were."

The deputation did nothing to Jacob Honesty; it did not even reproach him— it could find no words to fit the occasion. After gazing at him miserably in stunned silence for three minutes, it turned and walked away. The five citizens of Cowford paid Andy Apps the sum he demanded, also his costs, and nothing much is said about the sanctity of marriage in the township nowadays.

16: The Horror at Red Hook

H. P. Lovecraft

1890-1937

Weird Tales Jan 1927

"The nightmare horde slithered away, led by the abominable naked phosphorescent thing that now strode insolently, bearing in its arms the glassy-eyed corpse of the corpulent old man.

"There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move to my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight. It is possible that man may sometimes return on the track of evolution, and it is my belief that an awful lore is not yet dead."

—Arthur Machen

NOT MANY WEEKS AGO, on a street corner in the village of Pascoag, Rhode Island, a tall heavily built, and wholesome looking pedestrian furnished much speculation by a singular lapse of behavior. He had, it appears, been descending the hill by the road from Chepachet; and encountering the compact section, had turned to his left into the main thoroughfare where several modest business blocks convey a touch of the urban. At this point, without visible provocation, he committed his astonishing lapse; staring queerly for a second at the tallest of the buildings, before him, and then, with a series of terrified, hysterical shrieks, breaking into a frantic run which ended in a stumble and fall at the next crossing. Picked up and dusted off by ready hands, he was found to be conscious, organically unhurt, and evidently cured of his sudden nervous attack. He muttered some shamefaced explanations involving a strain he had undergone, and with downcast glance turned back, up the Chepachet road, trudging out of sight, without once looking behind him. It was a strange incident to befall so large, robust, normal-featured, and capable-looking a man, and the strangeness was not lessened by the remarks of a bystander who had recognized him as the boarder of a well-known dairyman on the outskirts of Chepachet.

He was, it developed, a New York police-detective named Thomas F. Malone, now on a long leave of absence under medical treatment after some disproportionately arduous work on a gruesome local case which accident had made dramatic. There had been a collapse of several old brick buildings during a raid in which he had shared, and something about the wholesale loss of life, both of prisoners and of his companions, had peculiarly appalled him. As a result, he had acquired an acute and anomalous horror of any buildings even remotely suggesting the ones which had fallen in, so that in the end mental specialists forbade him the sight of such things for an indefinite period. A police surgeon with relatives in Chepachet had put forward that quaint hamlet of wooden Colonial houses as an ideal spot for the psychological convalescence; and thither the sufferer had gone, promising never to venture among the brick-lined streets of

larger villages till duly advised by the Woonsocket specialist with whom he was put in touch. This walk to Pascoag for magazines had been a mistake, and the patient had paid in fright, bruises, and humiliation for his disobedience.

So much the gossips of Chepachet and Pascoag knew; and so much, also, the most learned specialists believed. But Malone had at first told the specialists much more, ceasing only when he saw that utter incredulity was his portion. Thereafter he held his peace, protesting not at all when it was generally agreed that the collapse of certain squalid brick houses in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, and the consequent death of many brave officers, had unseated his nervous equilibrium. He had worked too hard, all said, in trying to clean up those nests of disorder and violence; certain features were shocking enough, in all conscience, and the unexpected tragedy was the last straw. This was a simple explanation which everyone could understand, and because Malone was not a simple person he perceived that he had better let it suffice. To hint to unimaginative people of a horror beyond all human conception— a horror of houses and blocks and cities leprous and cancerous with evil dragged from elder worlds— would be merely to invite a padded cell instead of a restful rustication, and Malone was a man of sense despite his mysticism. He had the Celt's far vision of weird and hidden things, but the logician's quick eye for the outwardly unconvincing; an amalgam which had led him far afield in the forty-two years of his life, and set him in strange places for a Dublin University man born in a Georgian villa near Phoenix Park.

And now, as he reviewed the things he had seen and felt and apprehended, Malone was content to keep unshared the secret of what could reduce a dauntless fighter to a quivering neurotic; what could make old brick slums and seas of dark, subtle faces a thing of nightmare and eldritch portent. It would not be the first time his sensations had been forced to bide uninterpreted— for was not his very act of plunging into the polyglot abyss of New York's underworld a freak beyond sensible explanation? What could he tell the prosaic of the antique witcheries and grotesque marvels discernible to sensitive eyes amidst the poison cauldron where all the varied dregs of unwholesome ages mix their venom and perpetuate their obscene terrors? He had seen the hellish green flame of secret wonder in this blatant, evasive welter of outward greed and inward blasphemy, and had smiled gently when all the New Yorkers he knew scoffed at his experiment in police work. They had been very witty and cynical, deriding his fantastic pursuit of unknowable mysteries and assuring him that in these days New York held nothing but cheapness and vulgarity. One of them had wagered him a heavy sum that he could not— despite many poignant things to his credit in the *Dublin Review*— even write a truly interesting story of New York low life; and now, looking back, he perceived that cosmic irony had justified the prophet's words while secretly confuting their flippant meaning. The horror, as glimpsed at

last, could not make a story— for like the book cited by Poe's German authority, "*er lässt sich nicht lesen*"— it does not permit itself to be read.

TO MALONE the sense of latent mystery in existence was always present. In youth he had felt the hidden beauty and ecstasy of things, and had been a poet; but poverty and sorrow and exile had turned his gaze in darker directions, and he had thrilled at the imputations of evil in the world around. Daily life had for him come to be a fantasmagoria of macabre shadow-studies; now glittering and jeering with concealed rottenness as in Aubrey Beardsley's best manner, now hinting terrors behind the commonest shapes and objects as in the subtler and less obvious work of Gustave Doré. He would often regard it as merciful that most persons of high intelligence jeer at the inmost mysteries; for, he argued, if superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the very integrity of the universe. All this reflection was no doubt morbid, but keen logic and a deep sense of humor ably offset it. Malone was satisfied to let his notions remain as half-spied and forbidden visions to be lightly played with; and hysteria came only when duty flung him into a hell of revelation too sudden and insidious to escape.

He had for some time been detailed to the Butler Street station in Brooklyn when the Red Hook matter came to his notice. Red Hook is a maze of hybrid squalor near the ancient waterfront opposite Governor's Island, with dirty highways climbing the hill from the wharves to that higher ground where the decayed lengths of Clinton and Court Streets lead off toward the Borough Hall. Its houses are mostly of brick, dating from the first quarter of the middle of the nineteenth century, and some of the obscurer alleys and byways have that alluring antique flavor which conventional reading leads us to call "Dickensian." The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and Negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth, and sends out strange cries to answer the lapping of oily waves at its grimy piers and the monstrous organ litanies of the harbor whistles. Here long ago a brighter picture dwelt, with clear-eyed mariners on the lower streets and homes of taste and substance where the larger houses line the hill. One can trace the relics of this former happiness in the trim shapes of the buildings, the occasional graceful churches and the evidences of original art and background in bits of detail here and there— a worn flight of steps, a battered doorway, a wormy pair of decorative columns or pilasters, or a fragment of once green space with bent and rusted iron railing. The houses are generally in solid blocks, and now and then a many-windowed cupola arises to tell of days when the households of captains and ship-owners watched the sea.

From this tangle of material and spiritual putrescence the blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky. Hordes of prowlers reel shouting and singing along the lanes and thoroughfares, occasional furtive hands suddenly extinguish lights and pull down curtains, and swarthy, sin-pitted faces disappear from windows when visitors pick their way through. Policemen despair of order or reform, and seek rather to erect barriers protecting the outside world from the contagion.

The clang of the patrol is answered by a kind of spectral silence, and such prisoners as are taken are never communicative. Visible offenses are as varied as the local dialects, and run the gamut from the smuggling of rum and prohibited aliens through diverse stages of lawlessness and obscure vice to murder and mutilation in their most abhorrent guises. That these visible affairs are not more frequent is not to the neighborhood's credit, unless the power of concealment be an art demanding credit. More people enter Red Hook than leave it— or at least, than leave it by the landward side— and those who are not loquacious are the likeliest to leave.

MALONE found in this state of things a faint stench of secrets more terrible than any of the sins denounced by citizens and bemoaned by priest and philanthropists. He was conscious, as one who united imagination with scientific knowledge, that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances; and he had often viewed with an anthropologist's shudder the chanting, cursing processions of blear-eyed and pock-marked young men which wound their way along in the dark small hours of morning. One saw groups of these youths incessantly; sometimes in leering vigils on street corners, sometimes in doorways playing eerily on cheap instruments of music, sometimes in stupefied dozes or indecent dialogues around cafeteria tables near Borough Hall, and sometimes in whispering converse around dingy taxicabs drawn up at the high stoops of crumbling and closely shuttered old houses. They chilled and fascinated him more than he dared confess to his associates on the force, for he seemed to see in them some monstrous thread of secret continuity; some fiendish, cryptical and ancient pattern utterly beyond and below the sordid mass of facts and habits and haunts listed with such conscientious technical care by the police. They must be, he felt inwardly, the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the sharers of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than mankind. Their coherence and definiteness suggested it, and it showed in the singular suspicion of order which lurked beneath their squalid disorder. He had not read in vain such treatises as Miss Murray's *Witch Cult in Western Europe*; and knew that up to recent years there had certainly survived among peasants and furtive folk a frightful and clandestine system of assemblies and orgies descended from dark religions antedating the Aryan World, and appearing in popular legends

as Black Masses and Witches' Sabbaths. That these hellish vestiges of old Turanian-Asiatic magic and fertility-cults were even now wholly dead he could not for a moment suppose, and he frequently wondered how much older and how much blacker than the very worst of the muttered tales some of them might really be.

IT WAS THE CASE of Robert Suydam which took Malone to the heart of things in Red Hook. Suydam was a lettered recluse of ancient Dutch family, possessed originally of barely independent means, and inhabiting the spacious but ill-preserved mansion which his grandfather had built in Flatbush when that village was little more than a pleasant group of Colonial cottages surrounding the steepled and ivy-clad Reformed Church with its iron-railed yard of Netherlandish gravestones. In this lonely house, set back from Martense Street amidst a yard of venerable trees, Suydam had read and brooded for some six decades except for a period a generation before, when he had sailed for the Old World and remained there out of sight for eight years. He could afford no servants, and would admit but few visitors to his absolute solitude; eschewing close friendships and receiving his rare acquaintances in one of the three ground-floor rooms, which he kept in order— a vast, high-ceiled library whose walls were solidly packed with tattered books of ponderous, archaic, and vaguely repellent aspect. The growth of the town and its final absorption in the Brooklyn district had meant nothing to Suydam, and he had come to mean less and less to the town. Elderly people still pointed him out on the streets, but to most of the recent population he was merely a queer, corpulent old fellow whose unkempt white hair, stubbly beard, shiny black clothes and gold-headed cane earned him an amused glance and nothing more. Malone did not know him by sight till duty called him to the case, but had heard of him indirectly as a really profound authority on medieval superstition, and had once idly meant to look up an out-of-print pamphlet of his on the Kabbalah and the Faustus legend, which a friend had quoted from memory.

Suydam became a "case" when his distant and only relatives sought court pronouncements on his sanity. Their action seemed sudden to the outside world, but was really undertaken only after prolonged observation and sorrowful debate. It was based on certain odd changes in his speech and habits; wild references to impending wonders, and unaccountable hauntings of disreputable Brooklyn neighborhoods. He had been growing shabbier and shabbier with the years, and now prowled about like a veritable mendicant; seen occasionally by humiliated friends in subway stations, or loitering on the benches around Borough Hall in conversation with groups of swarthy, evil-looking strangers. When he spoke it was to babble of unlimited powers almost within his grasp, and to repeat with knowing leers such mystical words of names as "Sephiroth," "Ashmodai" and "Samael." The court action revealed that he was using up his income and wasting his principal in

the purchase of curious tomes imported from London and Paris, and in the maintenance of a squalid basement flat in the Red Hook district where he spent nearly every night, receiving odd delegations of mixed rowdies and foreigners, and apparently conducting some kind of ceremonial service behind the green blinds of secretive windows. Detectives assigned to follow him reported strange cries and chants and prancing of feet filtering out from these nocturnal rites, and shuddered at their peculiar ecstasy and abandon despite the commonness of weird orgies in that sodden section. When, however, the matter came to a hearing, Suydam managed to preserve his liberty. Before the judge his manner grew urbane and reasonable, and he freely admitted the queerness of demeanor and extravagant cast of language into which he had fallen through excessive devotion to study and research. He was, he said, engaged in the investigation of certain details of European tradition which required the closest contact with foreign groups and their songs and folk dances. The notion that any low secret society was preying upon him, as hinted by his relatives, was obviously absurd; and showed how sadly limited was their understanding of him and his work. Triumphant with his calm explanations, he was suffered to depart unhindered; and the paid detectives of the Suydams, Corlears and Van Brunts were withdrawn in resigned disgust.

It was here that an alliance of Federal inspectors and police, Malone with them, entered the case. The law had watched the Suydam action with interest, and had in many instances been called upon to aid the private detectives. In this work it developed that Suydam's new associates were among the blackest and most vicious criminals of Red Hook's devious lanes, and that at least a third of them were known and repeated offenders in the matter of thievery, disorder, and the importation of illegal immigrants. Indeed, it would not have been too much to say that the old scholar's particular circle coincided almost perfectly with the worst of the organized cliques which smuggled ashore certain nameless and unclassified Asian dregs wisely turned back by Ellis Island. In the teeming rookeries of Parker Place— since renamed— where Suydam had his basement flat, there had grown up a very unusual colony of unclassified slant-eyed folk who used the Arabic alphabet but were eloquently repudiated by the great mass of Syrians in and around Atlantic Avenue. They could all have been deported for lack of credentials, but legalism is slow-moving, and one does not disturb Red Hook unless publicity forces one to.

These creatures attended a tumbledown stone church, used Wednesdays as a dance hall, which reared its Gothic buttresses near the vilest part of the waterfront. Clergy throughout Brooklyn denied the place all standing and authenticity, and policemen agreed with them when they listened to the noises it emitted at night. Malone used to fancy he heard terrible cracked bass notes from a hidden organ far underground when the church stood empty and unlighted, whilst all observers dreaded the shrieking and drumming which accompanied the

visible services. Suydam, when questioned, said he thought the ritual was some remnant of Nestorian Christianity tintured with the Shamanism of Tibet. Most of the people, he conjectured, were of Mongoloid stock, originating somewhere in or near Kurdistan— and Malone could not help recalling that Kurdistan is the land of the Yezidees, last survivors of the Persian devil-worshippers. However this may have been, the stir of the Suydam investigation made it certain that these unauthorized newcomers were flooding Red Hook in increasing numbers; entering through some marine conspiracy unreached by revenue officers and harbor police, overrunning Parker Place and rapidly spreading up the hill, and welcomed with curious fraternalism by the other assorted denizens of the region. Their squat figures and characteristic squinting physiognomies grotesquely combined with flashy American clothing, appeared more and more numerous among the loafers and nomad gangsters of the Borough Hall section; till at length it was deemed necessary to compute their number, ascertain their sources and occupations, and find if possible a way to round them up and deliver them to the proper immigration authorities. To this task Malone was assigned by agreement of Federal and city forces, and as he commenced his canvass of Red Hook he felt poised upon the brink of nameless terrors, with the shabby, unkempt figure of Robert Suydam as archfiend and adversary.

POLICE METHODS are varied and ingenious. Malone, through unostentatious rambles, carefully casual conversations, well-timed offers of hip-pocket liquor, and judicious dialogues with frightened prisoners, learned many isolated facts about the movement whose aspect had become so menacing. The newcomers were indeed Kurds, but of a dialect obscure and puzzling to exact philology. Such of them as worked lived mostly as dock-hands and unlicensed peddlers, though frequently serving in Greek restaurants and tending corner newsstands. Most of them, however, had no visible means of support; and were obviously connected with underworld pursuits, of which smuggling and bootlegging were the least indescribable. They had come in steamships, apparently tramp freighters, and had been unloaded by stealth on moonless nights in rowboats which stole under a certain wharf and followed a hidden canal and house Malone could not locate, for the memories of his informants were exceedingly confused, while their speech was to a great extent beyond even the ablest interpreters; nor could he gain any real data on the reasons for their systematic importation. They were reticent about the exact spot from which they had come, and were never sufficiently off guard to reveal the agencies which had sought them out and directed their course. Indeed, they developed something like acute fright when asked the reason for their presence. Gangsters of other breeds were equally taciturn, and the most that could be gathered was that some god or great priesthood had promised them unheard-of powers and supernatural glories and rulerships in a strange land.

The attendance of both newcomers and old gangsters at Suydam's closely guarded nocturnal meetings was very regular, and the police soon learned that the erstwhile recluse had leased additional flats to accommodate such guests as knew his password; at last occupying three entire houses and permanently harboring many of his queer companions. He spent but little time now at his Flatbush home, apparently going and coming only to obtain and return books; and his face and manner had attained an appalling pitch of wildness. Malone twice interviewed him, but was each time brusquely repulsed. He knew nothing, he said, of any mysterious plots or movements; and had no idea how the Kurds could have entered or what they wanted. His business was to study undisturbed the folk-lore of all the immigrants of the district; a business with which policemen had no legitimate concern. Malone mentioned his admiration for Suydam's old brochure on the Kabbalah and other myths, but the old man's softening was only momentary. He sensed an intrusion, and rebuffed his visitor in no uncertain way; till Malone withdrew disgusted, and turned to other channels of information.

WHAT MALONE would have unearthed could he have worked continuously on the case, we shall never know. As it was, a stupid conflict between city and Federal authority suspended the investigation for several months, during which the detective was busy with other assignments. But at no time did he lose interest, or fail to stand amazed at what began to happen to Robert Suydam. Just at the time when a wave of kidnappings and disappearances spread its excitement over New York, the unkempt scholar embarked upon a metamorphosis as startling as it was absurd. One day he was seen near Borough Hall with clean-shaved face, well-trimmed hair, and tastefully immaculate attire, and on every day thereafter some obscure improvement was noticed in him. He maintained his new fastidiousness without interruption, added to it an unwonted sparkle of eye and crispness of speech, and began little by little to shed the corpulence which had so long deformed him. Now frequently taken for less than his age, he acquired an elasticity of step and buoyancy of demeanor to match the new tradition, and showed a curious darkening of the hair which somehow did not suggest dye. As the months passed, he commenced to dress less and less conservatively, and finally astonished his few friends by renovating and redecorating his Flatbush mansion, which he threw open in a series of receptions, summoning all the acquaintances he could remember, and extending a special welcome to the fully forgiven relatives who had lately sought his restraint. Some attended through curiosity, others through duty; but all were suddenly charmed by the dawning grace and urbanity of the former hermit. He had, he asserted, accomplished most of his allotted work; and having just inherited some property from a half-forgotten European friend, was about to spend his remaining years in a brighter second youth which ease, care and diet had made possible to him. Less and less was he

seen at Red Hook, and more and more did he move in the society to which he was born. Policemen noted a tendency of the gangsters to congregate at the old stone church and dancehall instead of at the basement flat in Parker Place, though the latter and its recent annexes still overflowed with noxious life.

THEN two incidents occurred— wide enough apart, but both of intense interest in the case as Malone envisaged it. One was a quiet announcement in the *Eagle* of Robert Suydam's engagement to Miss Cornelia Gerritsen of Bayside, a young woman of excellent position, and distantly related to the elderly bridegroom-elect; whilst the other was a raid on the dance-hall church by city police, after a report that the face of a kidnapped child had been seen for a second at one of the basement windows. Malone had participated in this raid, and studied the place with much care when inside. Nothing was found— in fact, the building was entirely deserted when visited— but the sensitive Celt was vaguely disturbed by many things about the interior. There were crudely painted panels he did not like— panels which depicted sacred faces with peculiarly worldly and sardonic expressions, and which occasionally took liberties that even a layman's sense of decorum could scarcely countenance. Then, too, he did not relish the Greek inscription on the wall above the pulpit; an ancient incantation which he had once stumbled upon in Dublin college days, and which read, literally translated: "O friend and companion of night, thou who rejoicest in the baying of dogs and spilt blood, who wanderest in the midst of shades among the tombs; who longest for blood and bringest terror to mortals, Gorge, Mormo, thousand-faced moon, look favorably on our sacrifices!"

When he read this he shuddered, and thought vaguely of the cracked bass organ-notes he fancied he had heard beneath the church on certain nights. He shuddered again at the rust around the rim of a metal basin which stood on the altar, and paused nervously when his nostrils seemed to detect a curious and ghastly stench from somewhere in the neighborhood. That organ memory haunted him, and he explored the basement with particular assiduity before he left. The place was very hateful to him; yet after all, were the blasphemous panels and inscriptions more than mere crudities perpetrated by the ignorant?

BY THE TIME of Suydam's wedding the kidnapping epidemic had become a popular newspaper scandal. Most of the victims were young children of the lowest classes, but the increasing number of disappearances had worked up a sentiment of the strongest fury. Journals clamored for action from the police, and once more the Butler Street station sent its men over Red Hook for clues, discoveries, and criminals. Malone was glad to be on the trail again, and took pride in a raid on one of Suydam's Parker Place houses. There, indeed, no stolen child was found, despite the tales of screams and the red sash picked up in the areaway; but the

paintings and rough inscriptions on the peeling walls of most of the rooms, and the primitive chemical laboratory in the attic, all helped to convince the detective that he was on the track of something tremendous. The paintings were appalling— hideous monsters of every shape and size, and parodies on human outlines which cannot be described. The writing was in red, and varied from Arabic to Greek, Roman, and Hebrew letters. Malone could not read much of it, but what he did decipher was portentous and cabalistic enough. One frequently repeated motto was in a sort of Hebraized Hellenistic Greek, and suggested the most terrible demon-evocations of the Alexandrian decadence:

HEL. HELOYM. SOTHER. EMMANVEL. SABOATH. AGLA. TETRAGRAMMATION. AGYROS. OTHEOS. ISCHYROS. ATHANATOS. IEHOVA. VA. ADONAL. SADY. HOMOVSION. MESSIAS. ESCHEREHEYE.

Circles and pentagrams loomed on every hand, and told indubitably of the strange beliefs and aspirations of those who dwelt so squalidly here. In the cellar, however, the strangest thing was found— a pile of genuine gold ingots covered carelessly with a piece of burlap, and bearing upon their shining surfaces the same weird hieroglyphics which also adorned the walls. During this raid the police encountered only a passive resistance from the squinting Orientals that swarmed from every door. Finding nothing relevant, they had to leave all as it was; but the precinct captain wrote Suydam a note, advising him to look closely to the character of his tenants, and protégés in view of the growing public clamor.

THEN CAME the June wedding and the great sensation; Flatbush was gay for the hour about high noon, and pennanted motors thronged the street near the old Dutch church where an awning stretched from door to highway. No local event ever surpassed the Suydam-Gerritsen nuptials in tone and scale, and the party which escorted the bride and groom to the Cunard pier was, if not exactly the smartest, at least a solid page from the Social Register! At 5 o'clock adieux was waved, and the ponderous liner edged away from the long pier, slowly turned its nose seaward, discarded its tug, and headed for widening water spaces that led to Old World wonders. By night the outer harbor was cleared, and late passengers watched the stars twinkling above an unpolluted ocean.

Whether the tramp steamer or the scream was first to gain attention, no one can say. Probably they were simultaneous, but it is of no use to calculate. The scream came from the Suydam stateroom, and the sailor who broke down the door could perhaps have told frightful things if he had not forthwith gone completely mad— as it is, he shrieked more loudly than the first victims, and thereafter ran simpering about the vessel till caught and put in irons. The ship's doctor who entered the stateroom and turned on the lights a moment later did not go mad, but told nobody what he saw till afterward, when he corresponded

with Malone in Chepachet. It was murder— strangulation— but one need not say that the claw-mark on Mrs. Suydam's throat could not have come from her husband's or any other human hand, or that upon the white wall there flickered for an instant in hateful red a legend which, later copied from memory, seems to have been nothing less than the fearsome Chaldee letters of the word "LILITH." One need not mention these things because they vanished so quickly— as for Suydam, one could at least bar others from the room until one knew what to think oneself. The doctor has distinctly assured Malone that he did not see *it*. The open porthole, just before he turned on the lights, was clouded for a second with a certain phosphorescence, and for a moment there seemed to echo in the night outside the suggestion of a faint and hellish tittering; but no real outline met the eye. As proof, the doctor points to his continued sanity.

Then the tramp steamer claimed all attention. A boat put off, and a horde of swart, insolent ruffians in officers' dress swarmed aboard the temporarily halted Cunarder. They wanted Suydam or his body— they had known of his trip, and for certain reasons were sure he would die. The captain's deck was almost a pandemonium; for at the instant, between the doctor's report from the stateroom and the demands of the men from the tramp, not even the wisest and gravest seaman could think what to do. Suddenly the leader of the visiting mariners, an Arab with a hatefully negroid mouth, pulled forth a dirty, crumpled paper and handed it to the captain. It was signed by Robert Suydam, and bore the following odd message:

In case of sudden or unexpected accident or death on my part, please deliver me or my body unquestioningly into the hands of the bearer and his associates. Everything, for me, and perhaps for you, depends on absolute compliance. Explanations can come later— do not fail me now.
Robert Suydam.

Captain and doctor looked at each other, and the latter whispered something to the former. Finally they nodded rather helplessly and led the way to the Suydam stateroom. The doctor directed the captain's glance away as he unlocked the door and admitted the strange seamen, nor did he breathe easily, till they filed out with their burden after an unaccountably long period of preparation. It was wrapped in bedding from the berths, and the doctor was glad that the outlines were not very revealing. Somehow the men got the thing over the side and away to their tramp steamer without uncovering it.

The Cunarder started again, and the doctor and ship's undertaker sought out the Suydam stateroom to perform what last services they could. Once more the physician was forced to reticence and even to mendacity, for a hellish thing had happened. When the undertaker asked him why he had drained off all of Mrs. Suydam's blood, he neglected to affirm that he had not done so; nor did he point

to the vacant bottle-spaces on the rack, or to the odor in the sink which showed the hasty disposition of the bottles' original contents. The pockets of those men—if men they were— had bulged damnably when they left the ship. Two hours later, and the world knew by radio all that it ought to know of the horrible affair.

THAT SAME June evening, without having heard a word from the sea, Malone was very busy among the alleys of Red Hook. A sudden stir seemed to permeate the place, and as if apprized by "grapevine telegraph" of something singular, the denizens clustered expectantly around the dance-hall church and the houses in Parker Place. Three children had just disappeared— blue-eyed Norwegians from the streets toward Gowanus— and there were rumors of a mob forming among the sturdy Viking of that section. Malone had for weeks been urging his colleagues to attempt a general clean-up; and at last, moved by conditions more obvious to their common sense than the conjectures of a Dublin dreamer, they had agreed upon a final stroke. The unrest and menace of this evening had been the deciding factor, and just about midnight a raiding party recruited from three stations descended upon Parker Place and its environs. Doors were battered in, stragglers arrested, and candle-lighted rooms forced to disgorge unbelievable throngs of mixed foreigners in figured robes, miters and other inexplicable devices. Much was lost in the mêlée for objects were thrown hastily down unexpected shafts, and betraying odors deadened by the sudden kindling of pungent incense. But spattered blood was everywhere, and Malone shuddered whenever he saw a brazier or altar from which the smoke was still rising.

He wanted to be in several places at once, and decided on Suydam's basement flat only after a messenger had reported the complete emptiness of the dilapidated dance-hall church. The flat, he thought, must hold some clue to a cult of which the occult scholar had so obviously become the center and leader; and it was with real expectancy that he ransacked the musty rooms, noted their vaguely charnal odor, and examined the curious books, instruments, gold ingots, and glass-stoppered bottles scattered carelessly here and there. Once a lean, black-and-white cat edged between his feet and tripped him, overturning at the same time a beaker half full of red liquid. The shock was severe, and to this day Malone is not certain of what he saw; but in dreams he still pictures that cat as it scuttled away with certain monstrous alterations and peculiarities.

THEN CAME the locked cellar door, and the search for something to break it down. A heavy stool stood near, and its tough seat was more than enough for the antique panels. A crack formed and enlarged, and the whole door gave way— but from the other side; whence poured a howling tumult of ice-cold wind with all the stenches of the bottomless pit, and whence reached a sucking force not of earth or heaven, which, coiling sentiently about the paralyzed detective, dragged him

through the aperture and down unmeasured spaces filled with whispers and wails, and gusts of mocking laughter.

Of course it was a dream. All the specialists have told him so, and he has nothing tangible to prove the contrary. Indeed, he would rather have it thus; for then the sight of old brick slums and dark foreign faces would not eat so deeply into his soul. But at the time it was all horribly real, and nothing can ever efface the memory of those nighted crypts, those titan arcades, and those half-formed shapes of hell that strode gigantically in silence holding half-eaten things whose still surviving portions screamed for mercy or laughed with madness. Odors of incense and corruption joined in sickening concert, and the black air was alive with the cloudy, semi-visible bulk of shapeless elemental things with eyes. Somewhere dark sticky water was lapping at onyx piers, and once the shivery tinkle of raucous little bells pealed out to greet the insane titter of a naked phosphorescent thing which swam into sight, scrambled ashore, and climbed up to squat leeringly on a carved golden pedestal in the black ground.

Avenues of limitless night seemed to radiate in every direction, till one might fancy that here lay the root of a contagion destined to sicken and swallow cities, and engulf nations in the fetor of hybrid pestilence. Here cosmic sin had entered, and festered by unhallowed rites had commenced the grinning march of death that was to rot us all to fungus abnormalities too hideous for the grave's holding. Satan here held his Babylonish court, and in the blood of stainless childhood the leprous limbs of phosphorescent Lilith were laved. Incubi and succubae howled praise to Hecate, and headless mooncalves bleated to the Magna Mater. Goats leaped to the sound of thin accursed flutes, and AEgipans chased endlessly after misshapen fauns over rocks twisted like swollen toads. Moloch and Ashtaroth were not absent; for in this quintessence of all damnation the bounds of consciousness were let down, and man's fancy lay open to vistas of every realm of horror and every forbidden dimension that evil had power to mold. The world and nature were helpless against such assaults from unsealed wells of night, nor could any sign or prayer check the Walpurgissage of horror which had come when a sage with the hateful locked and brimming coffer of transmitted demon-lore.

Suddenly a ray of physical light shot through these fantasies, and Malone heard the sound of oars amidst the blasphemies of things that should be dead. A boat with a lantern in its prow darted into sight, made fast to an iron ring in the slimy stone pier, and vomited forth several dark men bearing a long burden swathed in bedding. They took it to the naked phosphorescent thing on the carved gold pedestal, and the thing tittered and pawed the bedding. Then they unswathed it, and propped upright before the pedestal the gangrenous corpse of a corpulent old man with stubby beard and unkempt white hair. The phosphorescent thing tittered again, and the men produced bottles from their

pockets and anointed its feet with red, whilst they afterward gave the bottles to the thing to drink from.

All at once, from an arcaded avenue leading endlessly away, there came the demoniac rattle and wheeze of a blasphemous organ, choking and rumbling out of the mockeries of hell in cracked, sardonic bass. In an instant every moving entity was electrified; and forming at once into a ceremonial procession, the nightmare horde slithered away in quiet of the sound— goat, satyr, and Aegipan, incubus, succuba, and lemur, twisted toad and shapeless elemental, dog-faced howler and silent strutter in darkness— all led by the abominable naked phosphorescent thing that had squatted on the carved golden throne; and that now strode insolently bearing in its arms the glassy-eyed corpse of the corpulent old man. The strange dark man danced in the rear, and the whole column skipped and leaped with Dionysiac fury. Malone staggered after them a few steps, delirious and hazy, and doubtful of his place in this or any world. Then he turned, faltered, and sank down on the cold damp stone, gasping and shivering as the demon organ croaked on, and the howling and drumming and tinkling of the mad procession grew fainter and fainter.

Vaguely he was conscious of chanted horrors, and shocking croakings afar off. Now and then a wail or whine of ceremonial devotion would float to him through the black arcade, whilst eventually there rose the dreadful Greek incantation whose text he had read above the pulpit of that dance-hall church.

"O friend and companion of night thou who rejoicest in the baying of dogs (here a hideous howl burst forth) and spilt blood (here nameless sounds vied with morbid shriekings), who wanderest in the midst of shades among the tombs (here a whistling sigh occurred), who longest for blood and bringest terror to mortals (short, sharp cries from myriad throats), Gorgo (repeated as response), Mormo (repeated with ecstasy), thousand-faced moon (sighs and flute notes), look favorably on our sacrifices!"

As the chant closed, a general shout went up, and hissing sounds nearly drowned the croaking of the cracked bass organ. Then a gasp as from many throats, and a babel of barked and bleated words— "Lilith, Great Lilith, behold the Bridegroom!" More cries, a clamor of rioting, and the sharp, clicking footfalls of a running figure. The footfalls approached, and Malone raised himself to his elbow to look.

THE LUMINOSITY of the crypt, lately diminished, had now slightly increased; and in that devil-light there appeared the fleeing form of that which should not flee or feel or breathe— the glassy-eyed, gangrenous corpse of the corpulent old man, now needing no support, but animated by some infernal sorcery of the rite just closed. After it raced the naked, tittering, phosphorescent thing that belonged on the carven pedestal, and still farther behind panted the dark men, and all the

dread crew of sentient loathsomenesses. The corpse was gaining on its pursuers, and seemed bent on a definite object, straining with every rotting muscle toward the carved golden pedestal, whose necromantic importance was evidently so great. Another moment and it had reached its goal, whilst the trailing throng labored on with more frantic speed. But they were too late, for in one final spurt of strength which ripped tendon from tendon and sent its noisome bulk floundering to the floor in a state of jellyish dissolution, the staring corpse which had been Robert Suydam achieved its object and its triumph. The push had been tremendous, but the force had held out; and as the pusher collapsed to a muddy blotch of corruption the pedestal he had pushed tottered, tipped, and finally careened from its onyx base into the thick waters below, sending up a parting gleam of carven gold as it sank heavily to undreamable gulfs of lower Tartarus. In that instant, too, the whole scene of horror faded to nothingness before Malone's eyes; and he fainted amidst a thunderous crash which seemed to blot out all the evil universe.

MALONE'S DREAM, experienced in full before he knew of Suydam's death and transfer at sea, was curiously supplemented by some oddities of the case; though that is no reason why anyone should believe it. The three old houses in Parker Place, doubtless long rotten with decay in its most insidious form, collapsed without visible cause while half the raiders and most of the prisoners were inside; and both of the greater number were instantly killed. Only in the basements and cellars was there much saving of life, and Malone was lucky to have been deep below the house of Robert Suydam. For he really was there, as no one is disposed to deny. They found him unconscious by the edge of the night-black pool, with a grotesquely horrible jumble of decay and bone, identifiable through dental work as the body of Suydam, a few feet away. The case was plain, for it was hither that the smugglers' underground canal led; and the men who took Suydam from the ship had brought him home. They themselves were never found, or identified; and the ship's doctor is not yet satisfied with the certitudes of the police.

Suydam was evidently a leader in extensive man-smuggling operations, for the canal to his house was but one of several subterranean channels and tunnels in the neighborhood. There was a tunnel from this house to a crypt beneath the dance-hall church; a crypt accessible from the church only through a narrow secret passage in the north wall, and in whose chambers some singular and terrible things were discovered. The croaking organ was there, as well as a vast arched chapel with wooden benches and a strangely figured altar. The walls were lined with small cells, in seventeen of which— hideous to relate— solitary prisoners in a state of complete idiocy were found chained, including four mothers with infants of disturbingly strange appearance. These infants died soon after exposure to the light; a circumstance which the doctors thought rather merciful.

Nobody but Malone, among those who inspected them, remembered the somber question of old Delrio: "*An sint unquam daemones incubi et succubae, et an ex tali congressu proles nasci queat?*"

Before the canals were filled up they were thoroughly dredged, and yielded forth a sensational array of sawed and split bones of all sizes. The kidnapping epidemic, very clearly, had been traced home; though only two of the surviving prisoners could by any legal thread be connected with it. These men are now in prison, since they failed of conviction as accessories in the actual murders. The carved golden pedestal or throne so often mentioned by Malone as of primary occult importance was never brought to light, though at one place under the Suydam house the canal, was observed to sink into a well too deep for dredging. It was choked up at the mouth and cemented over when the cellars of the new houses were made, but Malone often speculates on what lied beneath. The police, satisfied that they had shattered a dangerous gang of maniacs and alien smugglers, turned over to the Federal authorities the unconvicted Kurds, who before their deportation were conclusively found to belong to the Yezidee clan of devils-worshippers. The tramp ship and its crew remain an elusive mystery, though cynical detectives are once more ready to combat its smuggling and rum-running ventures. Malone thinks these detectives show a sadly limited perspective in their lack of wonder at the myriad unexplainable details, and the suggestive obscurity of the whole case; though he is just as critical of the newspapers, which saw only a morbid sensation and gloated over a minor sadist cult when they might have proclaimed a horror from the universe's very heart. But he is content to rest silent in Chepachet, calming his nervous system and praying that time may gradually transfer his terrible experience from the realm of present reality to that of picturesque and semi-mythical remoteness.

Robert Suydam sleeps beside his bride in Greenwood Cemetery. No funeral was held over the strangely released bones, and relatives are grateful for the swift oblivion which overtook the case as a whole.

The scholar's connection with the Red Hook horrors, indeed, was never emblazoned by legal proof; since his death forestalled the inquiry he would otherwise have faced. His own end is not much mentioned, and the Suydams hope that posterity may recall him only as a gentle recluse who dabbled in harmless magic and folk-lore.

As for Red Hook— it is always the same. Suydam came and went; a terror gathered and faded; but the evil spirit of darkness and squalor broods on amongst the mongrels in the old brick houses; and prowling bands still parade on unknown errands past windows where lights and twisted faces unaccountably appear and disappear. Age-old horror is a hydra with a thousand heads, and the cults of darkness are rooted in blasphemies deeper than the well of Democritus. The soul of the beast is omnipresent and triumphant, and Red Hook's legions of blear-eyed,

pockmarked youths still chant and curse and howl as they file from abyss to abyss, none knows whence or whither, pushed on by blind laws of biology which they may never understand. As of old more people enter Red Hook than leave it on the landward side, and there are already rumors of new canals running underground to certain centers of traffic in liquor and less mentionable things.

The dance-hall church is now mostly a dance-hall, and queer faces have appeared at night at the windows. Lately a policeman expressed the belief that the filled-up crypt has been dug out again, and for no simply explainable purpose. Who are we to combat poisons older than history and mankind? Apes danced in Asia to those horrors, and the cancer lurks secure and spreading where furtiveness hides in rows of decaying brick.

Malone does not shudder without cause— for only the other day an officer overheard a swarthy squinting hag teaching a small child some whispering patois in the shadow of an areaway. He listened, and thought it very strange when he heard her repeat over and over again:

"O friend and companion of night thou who rejoicest in the baying of dogs and spilt blood, who wanderest in the midst of shades among the tombs, who longest for blood and bringest terror to mortals, Gorgo, Mormo, thousand-faced moon, look favorably on our sacrifices!"

17: Leg Man

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 1 March 1937

Mark Hellinger was a New York newspaperman and later a Hollywood movie producer. For more than 20 years he wrote a short, sharp tale every day, like this one, for his newspaper. Of the thousands written, some 200-odd found their way into Australian newspapers.

HE WAS a little chap. About this high. He had a lean, hungry-looking face, and his hair was always in need of combing. At first glance you'd say he was quite young. But, after a while, you'd notice the tuft of grey above each ear. And the change purse under each eye.

They called him Nappy. In the city room of his newspaper even the copy boys addressed him as Nappy. Only the cashier and a few old-timers knew his real name. The others never bothered to ask. Nappy was a leg man.

Know what a leg man is? Well, he's a reporter who is hired to run down stories— but is seldom asked to write them. He uses a telephone instead of a typewriter. Did a wealthy widow commit suicide and leave all her dough to a home for stray dogs? (Hey, Nappy. Get up to 68th and Park in a hurry!) Was a liner sinking at sea? (Hey, Nappy! Grab that phone book and check the passenger list!) Was there a movie star due in town today? (Hey, Nappy! Hop over to the station and ask her if it's true that her sixth husband will be an Indian chief.)

Leg man. That was Nappy. At the big fire, you wondered about the little feller who stood beside the battalion chief. Two to one it was Nappy. At the murder scene, the little guy who flashed the police card and darted up the steps to view the body was also Nappy. At the poultry show the gentleman who smelled of whisky and held his nose was— Right you are. Nappy.

This man was a conscientious worker. When the city desk sent him on a job. Nappy could be depended upon to get every bit of information. He was never known to shirk. He'd get everything possible. And then he'd phone the office. "Hello, boss. This is Nappy, on the kidnap. Naw, not much. They claim the note was a phoney. You want me to come in and write it? No? All right, then. Gimme Howard, willya? He understands English."

He'd stand in the booth, muttering to himself. Why didn't the boss order him to come in and write it? Why bother with a rewrite man? Couldn't he write rings around any rewrite man that ever lived? Why— "Oh. hello, Howard. This is Nappy, on the Brigham snatch. Listen, Howard. Try to catch it just as I tell it. You can ask questions afterward. Oke? Fine. Then listen: "Although Mr. Lemuel Plankington Brigham is still certain that his ten-year-old son. Joseph, is alive, District Attorney Schwartzbaum claims that handwriting experts are convinced the ransom note is

the work of a crank. The secret code, left in the child's bedroom, was not carried out in— "

Poor Nappy. His great ambition in life was to see a story published exactly as he had written it— and he was doomed never to realise that ambition. Sometimes the editor did tell him to come in and write his story. Not very often. But sometimes. On those infrequent occasions Nappy was the happiest man in town. He'd bounce out of the phone booth, dash into the subway and race up the stairs to the city room. He was going to write a story! At a typewriter he would roll a piece of paper into the carriage. Slowly, his index fingers would pick out the letters. Slowly, the great story would take shape. Page after page would go to the city editor's desk. And at last, when it was all completed, Nappy would leave the office, smiling from ear to ear.

As soon as he was gone the city editor would call Howard. "Nappy," he would say casually, "has just written himself another book." He'd toss the many pages to the rewrite man. "Glance through this junk— and boil it down to two paragraphs for the next edition."

As he grew older, Nappy became grimmer. When the city editor said: "Come in and write the story," Nappy cursed softly to himself. He knew it meant writing his fool head off— and then giving it to some rewrite man to mangle. Nappy wouldn't mind it so much if their stuff was better written than his. But it wasn't. Nappy was sure of that. His stories were written with meticulous care— and yet the boss never even glanced at them. Sometimes, when the paper wasn't too tight, the assistant city editor would use one or two of Nappy's stories as fillers at the bottoms of the pages. But never without changing them. Never.

Nappy put in more than twenty-five years as a leg man. Twenty-five years of chasing real alarms and interviewing false alarms. Twenty-five years of meeting boats on which he never sailed, trains on which he never rode, and people whom he never saw again. A long time, twenty-five years— and Nappy grew tired of waiting for death. He wasn't afraid of it; he was simply tired of waiting for it. Often, when he was drunk in the solitude of his room, he had to laugh at himself. Alcohol would make the situation seem funny. Here he was, a reporter for twenty-five years— and he had never seen a story published as he had written it! He'd chuckle. Then he'd laugh. And then he'd howl until the tears came.

One night he laughed for the last time. He sat down and wrote a short note, signed it with a flourish, and turned on the gas. In the morning the room was filled with cops and doctors. The landlady stood in the gloomy hallway and cried in her apron. Nappy was dead.

The news spread quickly around the office. The general tenor of the comment was: "Izzat so? Nice feller."

The city editor shook his head sadly and phoned to make certain that funeral arrangements were made. Several of the old-timers chipped in for flowers. The

cashier merely grunted and removed Nappy's name from the payroll. Another leg man was sent out to cover the story. He came back with Nappy's short suicide note— and very little else. He wasn't as good a leg man as Nappy had been.

The city editor read the note over and over again. He kept shaking his head as though he didn't quite understand. Nappy had died, according to this note, because he was tired of living. No other reason. Just tired. Grabbing a pencil, the city editor ruled off the paragraphs on the suicide note. Nappy deserved an obituary and the city editor was going to see that he got it. He wrote a short lead to the note and took it to the composing room himself.

And so it was that the strangest thing happened. Death accomplished what life had failed to give. Nappy's final story, the suicide note, went through all editions that day— unchanged!

18: How Dunstan Got Home Dry

A Story of the Frozen Meat Trade

John Arthur Barry

1851-1911

The Australasian Pastoralists' Review, 15 May 1896

HE NEVER APPEARED to take much notice of his wife or her friends and admirers. And his one cry, in and out of season, was— "I won't be buried at sea." A hollow-eyed wan-cheeked, coughing skeleton, restless and irritable in the knowledge of the near approach of the Destroyer, Dunstan used to look over at the foaming wake with a shudder of fear, and mutter to himself— "Not there! Not there!"

The woman, his wife, was *petite*, fair, and very pretty, and the other lady passengers used to hate her, because she monopolised the men and, above all, the Doctor— the handsomest man on board the s.s. *Kaiwi*. Late o' nights, long after the electric lights were out, the pair used to be watched by female vigilantes in dark corners of alleyways; also in the dispensary; and, once, it was even rumoured, in the Doctor's cabin itself.

"Shameless thing!" hissed the women.

"Devoted wife!" exclaimed the men. "Always hunting around getting medicine and stuff for her husband— poor devil!"

But Mrs. Dunstan seemed to care little for what anybody said. In his cold-blooded, cautious, Scotch fashion, the Captain admired her; and with two such potentates on her side as the Doctor and Skipper, a woman, or indeed anyone, can do much as they please on board a ship.

Once, it was after Mrs. Dunstan had been seen emerging from the Doctor's cabin at midnight laden with bottles of medicine, a deputation of female passengers interviewed the Captain. Formally they denounced the "goings on" of Mrs. Dunstan and Dr. Gordon as a scandal, and implored him if he valued the reputation of his ship to interfere at once.

They were all ladies of very uncertain ages, and the Captain listened politely, but was without sympathy. In his time he had gone through similar ordeals.

But, in private, he gave the Doctor a hint.

"It's all right," said the latter, with a conceited nod of his empty handsome head. "She's a smart little woman. And she's got money— whips of it. Dunstan can't last round the Cape. I'm sick of this life. When we're married I'll buy a place I know of in Kent, and you shall come and stop with us 'tween trips."

"Umph!" said the Captain, turning away with a sour smile on his hard features.

Unable to influence the skipper, the female deputation waited on Dunstan himself, and gave him their views on the situation. But in between coughing fits he only swore at and reviled them for a pack of envious mischief-makers. Aggravated beyond the bounds of decency, the spokeswoman at last told him to his face that

very shortly he would die and be thrown into the sea, and that his wife would be delighted to witness the ceremony

Then Dunstan reviled them some more, and after a fashion to make them fly with fingers stuffed in their ears. Besides keeping the ship well amused fore and aft, these proceedings had another effect, altogether unlooked-for by their promoters.

Hitherto Dunstan had taken little more notice of the Doctor than in a professional way. Now he not only grew excessively friendly with him, but, rather to Gordon's annoyance, followed him about the ship, exhibiting a sort of clinging dependence on him that became at times quite ludicrous. Fool as he was, the Doctor had sense enough to feel this, and attempt to shake his persecutor off.

Horribly sick, too, did the Doctor become of Dunstan's eternal question day and night— "You won't let them throw me into the water, will you?" to which the only reply he ever gave was the same— "No, old man, don't be frightened, I'll keep you dry somehow." But, as the sequel proved, Dunstan kept himself dry, and presently, a fresh whim seized the invalid, and he talked incessantly, and in the most confidential manner to Gordon about Mrs. Dunstan.

"She's a good little sort, old chap," he would say in the half-sneering, half-cajoling tone in which he always spoke to the Doctor, "a good little sort, no matter what those hags say; and I know there's no harm in her. It's hard to be tied to a sick man, you know. But I'm not selfish, and I want her to enjoy herself."

And Gordon, following his companion's eye as it turned to where, amidst a group of men, his wife, a picture of warmth and comfort in her furs, sat in a deck chair, would catch a look on his companion's face that puzzled him, and might, had he cared, have given him cause for thought. Then Dunstan took to constantly coupling the doctor's name with "Lizzie's," and quite as a matter of course, until it seemed to Gordon that the man already tacitly guessed at, and acquiesced in, the fact, long settled in his own mind, as to who was to be his successor.

Some details of the pair's pecuniary affairs the Doctor knew; and when Dunstan actually showed him a will, drawn up and signed before starting on what he felt would be his last journey, and allowed him to read it, and note the more than ample provision it contained for the widow-to-be, his exultation was boundless.

With all his good looks he had only just brains enough to be capable of mischief where a woman was concerned; and, excited and spurred on by Dunstan's scarcely veiled hints and innuendoes, and ghastly little jokes, he so far forgot himself as to one night actually discuss with him the future he had mapped out when "Lizzie" should be his wife.

They were in the middle of their second magnum of champagne— ordered and paid for by Dunstan— and as Gordon unfolded his plans the other swore, with tears in his eyes, that a better friend could no man have ; also, that he felt easy

now, not only as to "poor little Lizzie's future," but as to his own chance of dying a dry death.

Dunstan was a man who had travelled far and wide, and in his berth, to which he often invited the Doctor, were heaps of curios brought out of the hold and unpacked for the latter's edification. And one day, opening a little velvet-lined case, he took therefrom a beautifully cut flask of rock-crystal about the size of a pigeon's egg, and similar in shape, only square at the bottom. At intervals it was bound with gold bands, and close to the stopper of the same metal was a black pearl of large size and fine lustre.

"This should interest you," said Dunstan, as he held the flask up to the light, and showed it full of a bright, yellowish liquid. "It was given to me by Alang Husein, Rajah of Pasir-Salak, in Borneo, to whom I had been able to render some slight service. Watch how the stuff seethes and glows, always in a state of restless effervescence."

"What is it?" asked Gordon, after looking awhile.

"That I don't know," replied the other. "But I do know its effects. Look here!" and pulling at the black pearl he drew out, attached to it as to a hilt, a curved steel thread made to fit into a gold groove that ran round the flask. "Now," went on Dunstan, as he unscrewed the top and lightly dipped the needle in the liquid, "you observe these minute saw-like serrations. Well, the tiniest scratch on your skin, unfelt, really unperceivable, from one of these, and you're a dead man in three minutes," and as he spoke, holding the delicate little instrument gingerly between finger and thumb, he made playful passes at Gordon's hand.

"Bosh," replied the Doctor, recoiling, however. "There's no known poison acts so quickly. Your Rajah Thingumbob's been stuffing you. All those niggers are liars, more or less."

On a settee between the two men lay a fine Angora cat belonging to one of the stewardesses, fast asleep, and purring as it slept. Bending over, Dunstan touched it lightly—the merest flick—on the tip of the ear with his tiny weapon. "Now watch," he said to the Doctor, who had followed his movements with a face of sneering incredulity.

Suddenly the purring ceased; the animal awoke and shook its head violently. Then, jumping on to the carpet, it drew all its four paws in a heap together, arched its back, swayed to and fro for a few seconds, then fell over sideways—dead—having uttered no sound. Hardly a minute had elapsed since the giving of the fatal touch. Dunstan grinned at the Doctor, who, with all the colour gone from his florid cheeks, sat staring as if unable to believe his eyes. Then, as he carefully wiped the deadly instrument on his pocket-handkerchief and replaced it in its groove he said, "Well, what of my friend the Rajah now? Simple, isn't it. I've often been tempted to physio myself in similar fashion. Only then you'd serve me as I'm going to serve poor puss here," wrapping, as he spoke, the kerchief round the stiffened body and

throwing it through the open port. "Why, I could kill you," he went on, "or my wife in your sleep, couldn't I? There's no pain much, I'm sure; and you'd not have time to know what was happening. But don't be frightened. You've got to get me home dry, you know," and he grinned and coughed in ghastly fashion, never moving his eyes from his companion's pale face.

But the Doctor was shaken, and made no reply; only sat and looked, beginning also to faintly realise that the man whom he had regarded as merely a foolish, selfish monomaniac, was actually something else— something to be marked dangerous, and dealt cautiously with. And for several days after the cat episode he scarcely ventured near Mrs. Dunstan, and flipped savagely overboard the dozens of little notes he found in his berth and underneath the dispensary window. Nor did he perpetually remark, as heretofore, to his friend the Captain respecting the utter softness of the good thing he had in hand.

Dr. Gordon had seen something in a man's eyes, and got a fright.

But gradually the impression wore off, and matters between himself and "Lizzie" fell back into the same old groove. Also Dunstan's cough grew worse, and the man himself visibly weaker.

About this time it was that Dunstan made friends with the refrigerating engineer, even going so far as once or twice to accompany him on his rounds amongst the cargo— an experience that did his health no good. Still, as he remarked, he had never allowed any consideration of that kind to hinder him in the pursuit of knowledge.

Part of the *Kaiwi*'s cargo had been discharged damaged last trip because of, so experts said, too close packing. On this occasion alleyways had been left between the piles of carcasses in chambers 1,2, and 3; and these, at intervals, the engineer was supposed to traverse, thermometer in hand, noting temperatures. A cold job this, and one to be dressed up to. Dunstan insisted on going as he was, clad in tropical whites. The ship was crossing the Equator, and he said he wanted cooling. Perhaps, had they been aware of this last freak, the Doctor or Mrs. Dunstan might have interfered, perhaps. But the matter did not leak out until afterwards.

The big grey steamer was off the Western Islands, a fine bright morning, and the passengers' luggage on deck for the last time, when, all at once, a rumour of something terrible pervaded the ship, and speedily the news spread that, not only had the Doctor and Mrs. Dunstan been found dead in their berths, but that Mr. Dunstan was missing.

There was not a suspicious mark to be seen on either of the bodies, nor was there, to the lay eye, any sign of poison. It might have been a coincidence, certainly, so people said; but if 'twas, why then—

And the weather was very hot; so they buried them; everybody except the Captain with the word "suicide" on their lips.

But the Captain kept his own counsel. Not so long ago the Doctor had told him the story of the cat, making light of the incident to show that he had not been frightened. If Dunstan could have been found, the skipper might have behaved differently, as it was he felt justified.

But not the remotest trace of Dunstan came to light, and the notion that he had fallen overboard became the popular one— jump, they said, he never could. However, the tragedy lent unexpected zest to the finish up of the passage which was becoming monotonous.

To the captain's disgust the cargo was again found not up to the mark— temperature too low, the expert said. But what caused the refrigerating engineer to lose his billet was the fact that when the Tilbury Dock lumpers came to No. 3 chamber, which was the furthest for'ard, they found a corpse doubled up amongst the other carcasses and frozen hard and stiff as a board. Now, had the engineer gone his round properly, this could hardly have happened.

Also, clutched between the rigid fingers was a little crystal flask, unstoppered, and empty.

Asked at the inquest whether he had ever before seen the "exhibit," the captain replied truthfully enough that he never had.

But the secret of the ocean tragedy which, so far, he had but guessed, was no more a secret to him now than was the manner in which Dunstan had managed to get home dry.

19: The Demon Engine

Arthur B. Reeve

1880-1936

Cosmopolitan Oct 1915

Collected in: *The Social Gangster*, 1916

"PERPETUAL MOTION sounds foolish, I'll admit. But, Professor Kennedy, this Creighton self-acting motor does things I can't explain."

Craig looked perplexed as he gazed from Adele Laidlaw, his young and very pretty client, to me. We had heard a great deal about the young lady, one of the wealthiest heiresses of the country. She paused a moment and looked at us, evidently thinking of the many schemes which people had devised to get her money away from her.

Really," she went on, "I haven't a friend to whom I can go, except Mr. Tresham— no one on whom I can rely for advice in a case of this kind."

Several times, I recollected, there had been rumors that she was engaged to Leslie Tresham, who had been the lawyer for her father before his death. The rumors had always been denied, however, though I am sure it was not Tresham's fault.

"You see," she continued, as Craig still said nothing, "father was of a mechanical turn of mind; in fact so was the whole family, and I suppose I have inherited it. I'm just crazy over cars and boats. Anyhow, I was introduced to Mr. Creighton and he seemed so earnest and his work was so interesting that I bought a little of his stock. Now he needs more money to perfect his motor. Perhaps the thing is all right, but,— well, what do I really know about it?"

One could not help feeling a great deal of sympathy for her. She was not the type of woman who would be easily misled, yet I could imagine that she must constantly be on her guard against schemers of every sort lurking to take advantage of every whim.

"H'm," mused Kennedy, with a smile, eyeing our visitor keenly. "I've been consulted on about everything from pickpockets to the fountain of youth. Now it's perpetual motion. I must say, Miss Laidlaw, your case has a decided scientific interest for me, anyhow, as well as personal. I'd like to look at this wonderful machine, if you can arrange it."

"I can do that," she answered confidently with a glance of thanks to Kennedy for his help. "May I use your telephone?"

She had to wait some time for an answer to her call, but finally she got Creighton on the wire.

"He had just come in," she said, hanging up the receiver. "He'll be there if we come down right away."

Adele Laidlaw drove us downtown in her own high-powered car, which, true to her mechanical instincts, she handled herself. She drove it very well, too. In fact, I felt safer than with Kennedy, who, like many drivers, was inclined to take chances when he was at the wheel himself and could see what he was up against, though he balked severely when anyone else did it.

"How did you become interested in this perpetual motion machine, Miss Laidlaw?" he asked as we threaded our way through the dense traffic.

"Well, I suppose everyone knows that I'm interested in engines," she replied, as we waited for the signal from a policeman at a cross-street. "I've spent a good deal on them in speed-boats and in racing cars, too. An acquaintance, a friend of Mr. Creighton's, a Mrs. Barry,— Mr. Tresham knows her,— thought perhaps I might use the motor somehow and told me of it. I went down to see it and— I must confess that it fascinated me."

I had not yet quite got myself accustomed to a girl who was interested in such things, though, in these days, I must confess, saw no reason why she should not be. Kennedy was dividing his attention between the admirable manner in which she handled the car and her very expressive face. Was it really, I wondered, that Creighton, more than his motor, has fascinated her?

She drew up before the Consolidated Bank Building, a modern steel and concrete structure in the up-town business section.

"The laboratory is next door," she said, as she let the car slide ahead a few feet more. "Mr. Tresham's office is in the Bank Building. I've had to go there so often since father died that I stopped through force of habit, I suppose."

Mindful of Kennedy's admiration for Freud, his theory of forgetting occurred to me. Was there any significance in the mistake? Had the unconscious blunder betrayed something which perhaps she herself consciously did not realize? Was it Tresham, after all, whom she really admired and wanted to see?

Creighton's workshop was in an old two-story brick building, evidently awaiting only the development of the neighborhood before it was torn down. Meanwhile the two buildings were in marked contrast. Which of them typified Creighton? Was he hopelessly out of date, or really ahead of his time? I must confess to having had a lively curiosity to meet the inventor.

The entrance to the laboratory from the street was through a large door into a room in which was a carpenter's bench. On one side were some powerful winches and a large assortment of tools. In the back of the room a big door led to another room on the ground floor to the rear.

"Mr. Creighton's is upstairs," remarked Miss Laid-law, turning past the locked door and going up a worn flight of steps.

"Whose shop is that!" asked Kennedy, indicating the door.

"I don't know who rents these rooms down here," she replied.

Up the stairway we went to the second floor. On the top landing stood some old machinery. In a little room on one side was a big desk, as well as books, instruments, and drawings of all sorts. Opposite this room was another little room, with many bits of expensive machinery on shelves and tables. Back of these two, and up a step, was a large room, the full width of the building, the workshop of the inventor, into which she led us.

"I've brought a couple of friends of mine who may be interested in the vibrodyne motor," Miss Laidlaw introduced us.

"Very pleased to meet you, gentlemen," Creighton returned. "Before we get through, I think you'll agree with me that you never dreamed of anything more wonderful than this motor of mine."

He was a large, powerfully built man, with a huge head, square jaw with heavy side whiskers, and eyes that moved restlessly under a shock of iron-gray hair. Whether it was the actual size of his head or his bushy hair, one got the impression that his cranium housed a superabundant supply of brains.

Every action was nervous and quick. Even his speech was rapid, as though his ideas outstripped his tongue. He impressed one as absorbed in this thing which he said frankly had been his life study, every nerve strained to make it succeed and convince people.

"Just what is this force you call vibrodyne?" asked Craig, gazing about at the curious litter of paraphernalia in the shop.

"Of course, I'm willing to admit," began Creighton quickly, in the tone of a man who was used to showing his machine to skeptical strangers but must be allowed to explain it in his own way, "that never before by any mechanical, electrical, thermal, or other means has a self-moving motor been made."

He paused apparently to let us grasp the significance of what he was about to say. "But, is it impossible, as some of the old scientists have proved to their own satisfaction it must be?" he went on, warming up to his subject. "May there not be molecular, atomic, even ionic forces of which we have not dreamed? You have only to go back a few years and study radioactivity, for instance, to see how ideas may change.

"Today," he added emphatically, "the conservation of energy, in the old sense at least, has been overthrown. Gentlemen, all the old laws must be modified by my discovery of vibrodyne. I loose new forces— I create energy!"

I watched him narrowly as he proposed and rapidly answered his own questions. He was talking quite as much for Miss Laidlaw's benefit, I thought, as ours. In fact, it was evident that her interest in the machine and in himself pleased him greatly.

I knew already that though the search after perpetual motion through centuries had brought failure, still it captivated a certain type of inventive mind. I knew also that, just as the exact squaring of the circle and the transmutation of

metals brought out some great mathematical discoveries and much of modern chemistry, so perpetual motion had brought out the greatest of all generalizations of physics— the conservation of energy.

Yet here was a man who questioned the infallibility of that generalization. Actually taking the ultramodern view that matter is a form of energy, he was asserting that energy in some way might be created or destroyed, at least transformed in a manner that no one had ever understood before. To him, radioactivity which had overthrown or amplified many of the old ideas was only a beginning.

"Here is the machine," he pointed out at last, still talking, leading us proudly across the littered floor of his laboratory.

It seemed, at first glance, to consist of a circular iron frame, about a foot and a half in diameter, firmly bolted to the floor.

"I have it fastened down because, as you will see, it develops such a tremendous power," explained the inventor, adding, as he pointed above it, "That is all the power is developed from, too."

On a shelf was a Daniell battery of four cells. In the porous cup was bichromate of potash and in the outer vessel dilute sulphuric acid.

"Let me show you how I get two and a half horsepower out of three ounces of zinc for nine hours," went on Creighton proudly. "As you doubtless know, the usual thing is one horsepower per pound of zinc per hour. Ultimately, I expect to perfect the process until I get a thousand horsepower from an ounce in this vibrodyne motor."

He started the engine by attaching the wires from the comparatively weak Daniell cells. Slowly it began to move, gaining speed, until finally the very floor shook from the great power and the rapidity of the motion.

It seemed incredible that the small current from the battery should develop such apparent power and I looked at Kennedy in amazement.

"There's a carelessly— or purposely— ill-balanced flywheel, I suspect," whispered Craig to me surreptitiously.

"Yes, but the power," I persisted.

He shook his head. Evidently he was not convinced, but had no theory, yet.

Adele Laidlaw looked at Craig questioningly, as though to read what he thought of it. Before her he betrayed nothing. Now and then she would look earnestly at Creighton. It was evident that she admired him very much, yet there seemed to be something about him that she did not quite understand.

Just then the telephone rang. Creighton stopped his machine and left us for a moment to answer the call, while the engine slowed down and came to rest.

Quickly Kennedy pulled out his watch and pried the crystal off the face. He walked over to a basin and filled the crystal with a few drops of water. Then he set it down on the table.

I looked at it closely. As nearly as I could make out, there seemed to be a slight agitation on the surface of the thin film of water in the glass. Craig smiled quietly to himself and flicked the water into the sink, returning the crystal to his watch.

I did not understand just what it was that Craig was after, but I felt sure that there was some kind of vibration that he had discovered.

Meanwhile, we could hear Creighton telephoning and I noticed that Miss Laidlaw was alertly listening, too.

"Why, no," I heard him answer monosyllabically but in a tone that was carefully modulated, "not alone. Let me call you up— soon."

The conversation ended almost as abruptly as it had begun. Somehow, it seemed evident to me that Creighton had been talking to a woman. Though he apparently had not wanted to say anything before us, he could not disguise the fact. From his quick, nervous manner with us, I had concluded that no mere man could have commanded so deferential a tone from him.

A moment later he rejoined us, resuming his praises of his motor. By this time I had come to recognize that he was a master in the manipulation of fantastic terms, which I, at least, did not understand. Therein, perhaps, lay their potency, though I doubt whether Kennedy himself knew what Creighton meant when, he talked of "polar sympathy," "inter-atomic ether," "molecular disintegration," and "orbital chaos."

I saw that Adele Laidlaw was watching Creighton narrowly now. Was it on account of the telephone call? Who had it been? Perhaps, it occurred to me, it was Mrs. Barry. Was Creighton afraid of arousing the jealousy of Adele Laidlaw?

There seemed to be nothing more of importance that Craig could learn at present and we soon bade Creighton good-by, leaving with Miss Laidlaw. I noticed that he locked the door after us as we went out.

"I'd like to meet this Mrs. Barry," remarked Craig as we passed out of the building.

He said it evidently to see just how Miss Laidlaw would take it. "I think I can arrange that," replied Adele Laidlaw colorlessly. "I'll ask her to visit me this afternoon. You can call casually."

We accompanied her to her car, promising to report as soon as possible if we discovered anything new.

"I'm going in to call on Tresham," remarked Craig, turning into the Bank Building.

AS KENNEDY WALKED through the corridor of the building, he paused and bent down, as though examining the wall. I looked, too. There was a crack in the concrete, in the side wall toward the Creighton laboratory.

"Do you suppose vibration caused it?" I asked, remembering his watch crystal test.

Craig shook his head. "The vibrations in a building can be shown by a watch! glass full of water. You saw the surface of the liquid with its minute waves. There's vibration, all right, but that is not the cause of such cracks as these."

He stood for a moment regarding the crack attentively. On the floor on which we were was the Consolidated Bank itself. Beneath us were the Consolidated Safety Deposit vaults.

"What did cause them, then?" I asked, mystified.

"Apparently escaping currents of electricity are causing electrolysis of the Bank Building," he replied, his face wrinkled in thought "Electrolysis?" I repeated mechanically.

"Yes. I suppose you know how stray or vagrant currents affect steel and concrete?"

I shook my head in the negative.

"Well," he explained as we stood there, "I believe that in one government test at least it was shown that when an electric current of high voltage passes from steel to concrete, the latter is cracked and broken. Often a mechanical pressure as great as four or five thousand pounds a square inch is exerted and there is rapid destruction due to the heating effect of the current.

I expressed my surprise at what he had discovered. "The danger is easily overestimated," he hastened to add. "But in this case I think it is real, though probably it is a special and extreme condition. Still it is special and extreme conditions which we are in the habit of encountering in our cases, Walter. That is what we must be looking out for. In this instance the destruction due to electrolysis is most likely caused by the oxidation of the iron anode. The oxides which are formed are twice as great in volume as the iron was originally and the resulting pressure is what causes the concrete to break. I think we shall find that this condition will bear strict watching."

For a moment Kennedy stopped at the little office of the superintendent of the building, in the rear.

"I was just wondering whether you had noticed those cracks in the walls down the corridor," remarked Kennedy after a brief introduction.

The superintendent looked at him suspiciously. Evidently he feared we had some ulterior motive, perhaps represented some rival building and might try to scare away his tenants.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said confidently. "Just the building settling a bit—easily fixed."

"The safety vault company haven't complained?" persisted Kennedy, determined to get something out of the agent.

"No indeed," he returned confidently. "I guess they've got troubles of their own— real ones."

"How's that?" asked Craig, falling in with the man's evident desire to change the subject.

"Why, I believe their alarm system's out of order," he replied. "Some of the fine wires in it burnt out, I think. Defective wiring, I guess. Oh, they've had it patched up, changed about a little,— it's all right now, they say. But they've had a deuce of a time with the alarm ringing at all sorts of hours, and not a trace of trouble."

I looked quickly at Craig. Though the superintendent thought he had been very clever in changing the topic of conversation, he had unwittingly furnished us with another clue. I could not ask Craig before him and I forgot to do so later, but, to me at least, it seemed as if this might be due to induction from the stray currents.

"No one here seems to have suspected the Creighton motor, anyhow," commented Craig to me, as we thanked the superintendent and walked across to the elevators.

We rode up to Tresham's office, which was on the third floor, on the side of the building toward Creighton's laboratory. In fact one of the windows opened almost on the roof of the brick building next door.

We found Tresham in his office and he received us affably, I thought. "Miss Laidlaw told me she was going to consult you," he remarked as we introduced ourselves. "I'm glad she did so."

Tresham was a large, well-built fellow, apparently athletically inclined, clean shaven with dark hair that was getting very thin. He seemed quite at ease as he talked with us, yet I could tell that he was weighing us all the time, as lawyers will do.

"What do you think of Creighton's motor?" opened Kennedy. "You've seen it, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," he replied quickly and jerkily. "Since Miss Laidlaw became interested he's been in here to have me look over his application for a patent. You know, I used to be a patent lawyer for a number of years until I decided to branch out into general practice. Legally Creighton seems to be sound enough. Of course, you know, the patent office won't grant a patent on a machine such as he claims without a rigid demonstration. He needs money, he says, for that. If his idea is sound, I don't see any reason why he shouldn't get a basic patent."

Tresham paused. I was conscious that he was furtively watching the face of Kennedy as though he hoped to learn as much from him as Craig did on his part.

"It's the mechanical end of it that I don't understand," continued Tresham, after a pause. "Creighton claims to have discovered a new force which he calls vibrodyne. I think it is just as well that Miss Laidlaw has decided to consult a scientist about it before she puts any more money into the thing. I can't say I approve of her interest in it— though, of course, I know next to nothing about it, except from the legal standpoint."

"Who is that Mrs. Barry of whom Miss Laidlaw spoke?" asked Kennedy a moment later.

"I believe she is a friend of Creighton's. Somehow she got acquainted with Miss Laidlaw and introduced her to him."

"You know her!" queried Craig casually.

"Oh, yea," came the frank reply. "She has been in to see me, too; first to interest me in the motor, and then to consult me about various legal points in connection with it."

I felt sure that Tresham was more than just a bit jealous of his pretty client. Certainly his tone was intended to convey the impression that he wished she would leave her affairs in his hands entirely.

"You don't know anything more about her— where she came from— her connections?" added Craig.

"Hardly more than you do," asserted Tresham. "I've only seen the woman a few times. In fact I should be glad to know more about her— and about Creighton, too. I hope that if you find out anything you'll let me know so that I can protect Miss Laid-law's interests."

"I shall do so," promised Kennedy, rising.

"Ill do the same," agreed Tresham, extending his hand. "I see no reason why we shouldn't work together for— my client."

There was no mistaking the fact that Tresham would have liked to be able to say something more intimate than "client." Perhaps he might have been nearer to it if her interest in him had not been diverted by this wonderful motor. At any rate I fancied he had little love for Creighton. Yet, when I reflected afterward, it seemed like a wide gulf that must separate a comparatively impecunious lawyer from a wealthy girl like Adele Laidlaw.

Kennedy was not through with his effort to learn something by a thorough investigation of the neighborhood yet. For some time after we left Tresham's office, he stood in the doorway of the Bank Building, looking about as though he hated to leave without establishing some vantage point from which to watch what was going on in Creighton's laboratory.

"Of course I can't very well get into the safety vault under the bank," he mused. "I wish I could."

He walked past Creighton's without seeing anything happen. The next building was a similar two-story brick affair. A sign on it read, "Studios and Offices For Rent."

An idea seemed to be suggested to him by the sign. He wheeled and entered the place. Inquiry brought out a caretaker who showed us several rooms unoccupied, among them one vacant on the first floor.

Kennedy looked it over carefully, as though considering whether it was just the place he wanted, but ended, as I knew he intended, in hiring it.

"I can't move my stuff in for a couple of days," he told the caretaker.

"Meanwhile, I may have the key, I suppose?"

He had paid a good deposit and the key was readily forthcoming.

The hiring of the ground floor room accomplished without exciting suspicion, Kennedy and I made a hasty trip up to his own laboratory, where he took a small box from a cabinet and hurried back to the taxicab which had brought us uptown.

Back again in the bare room which he had acquired, Craig set to work immediately installing a peculiar instrument which he took from the package.

It seemed to consist of two rods much like electric light carbons, fixed horizontally in a wooden support with a spindle-shaped bit of carbon between the two ends of the rods. Wires were connected with binding screws at the free ends of the carbon rods.

First Craig made a connection with an electric light socket from which he removed the bulb, cutting in a rheostat. Then he attached the free wires from the carbons to a sort of telephone headgear and switched on the current.

"What is it?" I asked curiously.

"A geophone," he replied simply.

"And what is a geophone?" I inquired.

"Literally an earth-phone," he explained. "It is really the simplest form of telephone, applied to the earth. You saw what it was. Any high school student of physics can make one, even with two or three dry batteries in circuit."

"But what does it do?" I asked.

"It is really designed to detect earth vibrations. All that is necessary is to set the carbon stick arrangement, which is the transmitter of this telephone, on the floor, place myself at the other end and listen. A trained ear can readily detect rumblings. Really it is doing in a different and often better way what the seismograph does. This instrument is so sensitive that it will record the slamming of a cellar door across the street. No one can go up those stairs next door without letting me know it, no matter how cautious he is about it."

Craig stood there some minutes holding the thing over his ears and listening intently.

"The vibrodyne machine isn't running," he remarked finally after repeated adjustments of the geophone. "But someone is in that little room under Creighton's workshop. I suspected that something was down there after that watch crystal test of mine. Now I know it. I wonder what the man is doing?"

There was no excuse yet, however, for breaking into the room on the other side of the wall and under Creighton's. Kennedy went out and watched. Though we waited some time nobody came out. He went back to our own room in the rear of the first floor. Though we both listened some time, neither of us could now hear a sound through the geophone except those made by passing trolleys and street vehicles.

Inquiry about the neighborhood did not develop who was the tenant or what was his business. In fact the results were just the reverse. No one seemed to know even the business conducted there. The room back of the locked door which Miss Laidlaw had passed was shrouded in mystery.

Nothing at all of any value was being recorded by the geophone when Kennedy glanced quickly at his watch. "If we are to see Miss Laidlaw and meet that Mrs. Barry, we had better be on our way," he remarked hurriedly.

Miss Laidlaw was living in a handsome apartment on Central Park, West. We entered and gave our cards to the man at the door of her suite, who bowed us into a little reception room. We entered and waited.

Suddenly we were aware that someone in the next room, a library, was talking. Whether we would or not we could not help overhearing what was said. Apparently two women were there, and they were not taking care how loud they spoke.

"Then you object to my even knowing Mr. Creighton?" asked one of the voices, pausing evidently for a reply which the other did not choose to make. "I suppose if it was Mr. Tresham you'd object, too."

There was something "catty" and taunting about the voice. It was a hard voice, the voice of a woman who had seen much and felt fully capable of taking care of herself in more.

"You can't make up your mind which one you care for most, then? Is that it?" pursued the same voice. "Well, I'll be a sport. I'll leave you Creighton— if you can keep him."

"I want neither," broke in a voice which I recognized at once as Adele Laidlaw's.

She spoke with a suppressed emotion which plainly indicated that she did want one of them.

Just then the butler entered with our cards. We heard no more. A moment later we were ushered into the library.

Mrs. Barry was a trim, well-groomed woman whose age was deceptive. I felt that no matter what one might think of Miss Laidlaw, here was a woman whose very looks seemed to warn one to be on his guard. She was a woman of the world, confident in her own ability to take care of herself.

Adele was flushed and excited, as we entered, though she was making a desperate effort to act as though nothing had happened.

"My friend, Professor Kennedy, and Mr. Jameson," she introduced us simply, making no pretense to conceal our identity.

Mrs. Barry was, in addition to her other accomplishments, a good actress. "I've heard a great deal about you, Professor," she said, extending her hand, but not taking her eyes off Craig's face.

Kennedy met her gaze directly. What did she mean? Had she accepted Miss Laidlaw's invitation to call in order to look us over, knowing that we had come to do the same?

"Mr. Creighton tells me that you have been to see his new motor," she ventured, even before any of us could open the subject.

She seemed to enjoy making the remark for the specific purpose of rousing Miss Laidlaw. It succeeded amply, also. The implication that Creighton took her into his confidence was sufficient to cause Adele Laidlaw to shoot an angry glance at her.

Mrs. Barry had no objection to sticking a knife in and turning it around. "Of course I don't know as much about such things as Miss Laidlaw," she purred, "but Mr. Tresham tells me that there may be some trouble with the patent office about allowing the patent. From all I have heard there's a fortune in that motor for someone. Wonderful, isn't it?"

Even the mention of Tresham's name in the studied familiarity of her tone seemed to increase the scarcely latent hostility between the two women. Kennedy, so far, had said nothing, content merely to observe.

"It appears to be wonderful," was all he said, guardedly.

Mrs. Barry eyed him sharply and Miss Laidlaw appeared to be ill at ease. Evidently she wanted to believe in Creighton and his motor, yet her natural caution forbade her. The entrance of Kennedy into the case seemed to have proved a disturbing factor between the two women, to have brought matters to a head.

We chatted for a few minutes, Kennedy deftly refusing to commit himself on anything, Mrs. Barry seeking to lead him into expressing some opinion, and endeavoring to conceal her exasperation as he avoided doing so.

At last Kennedy glanced at his watch, which reminded him of a mythical appointment, sufficient to terminate the visit.

"I'm very glad to have met you," he bowed to Mrs. Barry, as she, too, rose to go, while he preserved the fiction of merely having dropped in to see Miss Laidlaw. He turned to her. "I should be delighted to have both you and Mr. Tresham drop in at my laboratory some time, Miss Laidlaw."

Miss Laidlaw caught his eye and read in it that this was his way, under the circumstances, of asking her to keep in touch with him.

"I shall do so," she promised.

We parted from Mrs. Barry at the door of her taxicab.

"A very baffling woman," I remarked a moment later. "Do you suppose she is as intimate with Creighton as she implies?"

Kennedy shook his head. "It isn't that that interests me most, just now," he replied. "What I can't figure out is Adele Laidlaw's attitude toward both Creighton and Tresham. She seems to resent Mrs. Barry's intimacy with either."

"Yes," I agreed. "Sometimes I have thought she really cared for both— at least, that she was unable to make up her mind which she cared for most. Offhand, I should have thought that she was the sort who wouldn't think a man worth caring much for."

Kennedy shook his head. "Given a woman, Walter," he said thoughtfully, "whose own and ancestral training has been a course of suppression, where she has been taught and drilled that exhibitions of emotion and passion are disgraceful, as I suspect Miss Laidlaw's parents have believed, and you have a woman whose primitive instincts have been stored and strengthened. The instincts are there, nevertheless, far back in the subconscious mind. I don't think Adele Laidlaw knows it herself, but there is something about both those men which fascinates her and she can't make up her mind which fascinates her most. Perhaps they have the same qualities."

"But Mrs. Barry," I interrupted. "Surely she must know."

"I think she does," he returned. "I think she knows more than we suspect."

I looked at him quickly, not quite making out the significance of the remark, but he said no more. For the present, at least, he left Adele Laidlaw quite as much an enigma as ever.

"I wish that you would make inquiries about regarding Mrs. Barry," he said finally as we reached the subway. "I'm going down again to the little room we hired and watch. You'll find me at the laboratory later tonight."

I TRIED MY BEST, but there was very little that I could find out about Mrs. Barry. No one seemed to know where she came from, and even "Mr. Barry" seemed shrouded in obscurity. I was convinced, however, that she was an adventuress.

One thing, however, I did turn up. She had called on Tresham at his office a number of times, usually late in the afternoon, and he had taken her to dinner and to the theater. Apparently he knew her a great deal better than he had been willing to admit to us. I was not surprised, for, like a good many men of his class, Tresham was better known in the white light district than one might suspect. Mrs. Barry had all the marks of being good company on such an excursion.

On the way uptown, I stopped off in the neighborhood of Longacre Square in the hope of picking up some more gossip at one or another of the clubs. Tresham was a member of several, though as near as I could find out, used them more for business than social reasons. On Broadway it was different, however. There he was known as a liberal spender and lover of night life. Like many others he now

and then accumulated quite large bills. I wondered whether Mrs. Barry had not found out and taken advantage of his weakness.

It was, as I have said, comparatively little that I had been able to discover, yet when I met Kennedy again, later in the evening, at his laboratory, he listened eagerly to what I had to report.

"Did anything happen downtown?" I asked when I had finished.

"Nothing much," he returned. "Of course, listening over the geophone, I couldn't watch the Bank Building, too. There's something very queer about Creighton. I could hear him at work in the room upstairs until quite late, making a lot of noise. If I don't find out anything more definite soon, I shall have to adopt some other measures."

"You didn't do anything more about that electrolysis clew?" I queried.

"Nothing," he replied briefly, "except that I inquired of the electric light company and found out that Creighton, or someone in his building, was using a good deal of power."

"That looks bad," I ventured, remembering the claims made for the engine and the comparatively weak batteries that were said to run it.

Kennedy nodded acquiescence, but said nothing more. We walked over in silence to our apartment on the Heights and far into the night Craig sat there, shading his eyes with his hand, apparently studying out the peculiar features of the case and planning some new angle of approach at it tomorrow.

We were surprised the next day to receive an early visit from Miss Laidlaw at the laboratory. She drove up before the Chemistry Building, very much excited, as though her news would not bear repeating even over the telephone.

"What do you think?" she exclaimed, bursting in on us. "Mr. Creighton has disappeared!"

"Disappeared?" repeated Kennedy. "How did you find it out?"

"Mr. Tresham just telephoned me from his office," she hurried on. "He was going into the Bank Building when he saw a wagon drive off from the place next door. He thought it was strange and instead of going on up to his own office he walked into Creighton's. When he tried to get in, the place was locked. There's a sign on it, too, 'For Rent,' he says."

"That's strange," considered Kennedy. "I suppose he didn't notice what kind of wagon it was?"

"Yes, he said it looked like a junk wagon— full of stuff."

I looked from Miss Laidlaw to Kennedy. Plainly our entrance into the case had been the signal for the flitting of Creighton.

Quickly he reached for the telephone. "You know Mrs. Barry's number?" he asked.

"Yes, it's the Prince Edward Hotel."

He called up, but the conversation was over in a moment. "She didn't return to the hotel last night," he announced as he hung up the receiver.

"She's in this thing, too," exclaimed Adele Laidlaw. "Can you go down with me now and meet Mr. Tresham? I promised I would."

Though she repressed her feelings, as usual, I could see that Adele Laidlaw was furious. Was it because Creighton had gone off with her money, or was it pique because Mrs. Barry had, perhaps, won him? At any rate, someone was going to feel the fury of her scorn.

We motored down quickly in Miss Laidlaw's car and met Tresham, who was standing in front of the Bank Building waiting for us.

"It just happened that I came down early this morning," he explained, "or I shouldn't have noticed anything out of the way. The junk wagon was just driving away as I came up. It seemed to be in such a hurry that it attracted my attention."

It was the first time we had seen Tresham and Miss Laidlaw together and I was interested to see how they would act. There was no mistaking his attitude toward her and Adele was much more cordial to him than I had expected.

"While I was waiting I got a key from the agent," he explained. "But I didn't want to go in until you came."

Tresham opened the door and led the way upstairs, Miss Laidlaw following closely. As we entered Creighton's shop, everything seemed to be in the greatest disorder. Prints and books were scattered about, the tools were lying about wherever they happened to have been left, all the models were smashed or missing and a heap of papers in the fireplace showed where many plans, letters and other documents had been burned.

We hurried into the big room. Sure enough, the demon motor itself was gone! Creighton had unbolted it from the floor and some holes in the boards had been plugged up. The room below was still locked and the windows were covered with opaque paper on the inside.

"What do you suppose he has done with the motor?" asked Adele.

"The only clue is a junk dealer whom we don't know," I replied, as Kennedy said nothing.

We looked about the place thoroughly, but could find nothing else. Creighton seemed to have made a clean getaway in the early hours.

"I wish I could stay and help you," remarked Tresham at length. "But I must be in court at ten. If there's anything I can do, though, call on me."

"I'm going to find that engine if I have to visit every junk dealer in New York," declared Miss Laidlaw soon after Tresham left.

"That's about all we can do, yet, I guess," remarked Kennedy, evidently not much worried about the disappearance of the inventor.

Together we three closed up the workshop and started out with a list from a trade publication giving all those who dealt in scrap iron and old metal. In fact we

spent most of the day going from one to another of the junk shops. I never knew that there were so many dealers in waste. They seemed to be all over the city and in nearly every section. It was a tremendous job, but we mapped it out so that we worked our way from one section to another.

We had got as far as the Harlem River when we entered one place and looked about while we waited for someone in charge to appear.

I heard a low exclamation from Kennedy, and turned to look in the direction he indicated. There, in a wagon from which the horse had been unhitched, was the heavy base of the engine into which so many dollars had been turned— sold as so much scrap!

Kennedy examined it quickly, while I questioned a man who appeared from behind a shed in the rear. It was useless. He could give no clue that we already could not guess. He had just bought it from a man who seemed anxious to get rid of it. His description of the man tallied with Creighton. But that was all. It gave us no chance to trace him.

"Look," exclaimed Kennedy eagerly, bending closer over the motor. "This is one of the neatest perpetual motion frauds I ever heard of."

He had turned the heavy base of the motor upward. One glance left me with little wonder why Creighton had so carefully bolted the machine to the floor. In the base were two rectangular apertures to allow a belt to run over a concealed pulley on the main shaft of the machine in the case. Evidently, when the circuit from the Daniell cells was closed, the pulley, somehow, was thrown into gear. It was loose and the machine began to revolve slowly at first, then faster and with great show of power. The pounding, as Kennedy had surmised, was due to the flywheel not well balanced.

"Well," I remarked, "now that we have found it, I don't see that it does us much good."

"Only that we understand it," returned Craig. "I left that geophone down there in the room next door which I hired. I think, if Miss Laidlaw will take us down there, I'd like to get it."

He spoke with a sort of easy confidence which I knew was hard to be assumed in the face of what looked like defeat. Had Craig deliberately let Creighton have a chance to get away, in order that he might convict himself?

In silence, with Miss Laidlaw at the wheel, we went downtown again to the room which Craig had hired next to Creighton's workshop. As we approached it, he leaned over to Miss Laidlaw.

"Stop around the corner," he asked. "Let's go in quietly."

We entered our bare little room and Kennedy set to work as though to detach the geophone, while I explained it to our client.

"What's the matter?" she interrupted in the middle of my explanation, indicating Kennedy.

He had paused and had placed the receivers to his ears. By his expression I knew that the instrument was registering something.

"Someone is in the lower room of the shop next door," he answered, facing us quickly. "If we hurry, we'll have him cornered."

Miss Laidlaw and I went out and around in front, while Craig dashed through a back door to cut off retreat that way.

"What's that? Hurry!" exclaimed Miss Laidlaw.

Plainly there was a muffled scream of a woman as we entered the street door. I hurried forward. It was the work of only a few seconds to batter down the locked door in the room under Creighton's old workshop, and as the door gave way, I heard the sound of shattered glass from the rear which told that Kennedy had heard the scream, too, and had gained an entrance.

Inside I could make out in the half-light a man and a woman. The woman was running toward me, as if for help.

"Mrs. Barry!" gasped Adele Laidlaw.

"He got me here— to kill me!" she cried hysterically. "I am the only one who knows the truth— it was the last day— tonight he would have had the money— and I would have been out of the way. But I'll expose him— I'll ruin him. See— he came in from the roof—"

A blinding flash of light greeted us, followed by a scream from Adele Laidlaw, as she ran past us and dropped on her knees beside a body that had fallen. With a thud in the flame before a yawning hole in the side wall.

Mrs. Barry ran past me, back again, at almost the same moment. It was a strange sight— these two women glaring at each other over the prostrate figure of the man.

"Here's the real demon engine," panted Craig, coming up from the back and pointing to an electric motor as well as other apparatus consisting of several series of coils. "The perpetual motion machine was just a fake. It was merely a cover to an attempt to break into the bank vaults by electrolysis of the steel and concrete. Creighton was a dummy, a fiction— to take the blame and disappear when the robbery was discovered."

"Creighton," I repeated, looking at the man on the floor, "a dummy?"

"Oh— he's dead!" wailed Adele Laidlaw. "He's dead!"

"Electrocuted by his own machine rather than face disgrace and disbarment," cut in Craig. "No wonder she was in doubt which of the two men fascinated her most."

I moved forward and bent over the contorted form of the lawyer, Tresham, who was wearing the whiskers and iron gray wig of his alter-ego, Creighton.

20: At the Pistol's Point

E. W. Hornung

1866-1921

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THE CHURCH BELLS WERE ringing for evensong, croaking across the snow with short, harsh strokes, as though the frost had eaten into the metal and made it hoarse. Outside, the scene had all the cheery sparkle, all the peaceful glamour, of an old-fashioned Christmas card. There was the snow-covered village, there the church-spire coated all down one side, the chancel windows standing out like oil-paintings, the silver sickle of a moon, the ideal thatched cottage with the warm, red light breaking from the open door, and the peace of Heaven seemingly pervading and enveloping all. Yet on earth we know that this peace is not; and the door of the ideal cottage had been opened and was shut by a crushed woman, whose husband had but now refused her pennies for the plate, with a curse which followed her into the snow. And the odour prevailing beneath the thatched roof was one of hot brandy-and-water, mingled with the fumes of some rank tobacco.

Old Fitch was over sixty years of age, and the woman on her way to church was his third wife; she had borne him no child, nor had Fitch son or daughter living who would set foot inside his house. He was a singular old man, selfish and sly and dissolute, yet not greatly disliked beyond his own door, and withal a miracle of health and energy for his years. He drank to his heart's content, but he was never drunk, nor was Sunday's bottle ever known to lose him the soft side of Monday's bargain. By trade he was game-dealer, corn-factor, money-lender, and mortgagee of half the village; in appearance, a man of medium height, with bow-legs and immense round shoulders, a hard mouth, shrewd eyes, and wiry hair as white as the snow outside.

The bells ceased, and for a moment there was no sound in the cottage but the song of the kettle on the hob. Then Fitch reached for the brandy-bottle, and brewed himself another steaming bumper. As he watched the sugar dissolve, a few notes from the organ reached his ears, and the old man smiled cynically as he sipped and smacked his lips. At his elbow his tobacco-pipe and the weekly newspaper were ranged with the brandy-bottle, and he was soon in enjoyment of all three. Over the paper Fitch had already fallen asleep after a particularly hearty mid-day meal, but he had not so much as glanced at the most entertaining pages, and he found them now more entertaining than usual. There was a scandal in high life running to several columns, and sub-divided into paragraphs labelled with the most pregnant headlines; the old man's mouth watered as he determined to leave this item to the last. It was not the only one of interest; there were several suicides, an admirable execution, a burglary, and— what? Fitch frowned as his quick eye came tumbling down a paragraph; then all at once he gasped out an

oath and sat very still. The pipe in his mouth went out, the brandy-and-water was cooling in his glass; you might have heard them singing the psalms in the church hard by; but the old man heard nothing, saw nothing, thought of nothing but the brief paragraph before his eyes.

ESCAPE FROM PORTLAND
ONE CONVICT KILLED
ANOTHER WOUNDED
BUT A THIRD GETS CLEAN AWAY.

The greatest excitement was caused at Weymouth yesterday morning on the report being circulated that several convicts had effected their escape from the grounds of the Portland convict establishment. There appears to have been a regularly concerted plan on the part of the prisoners working in one of the outdoor gangs to attempt to regain their liberty, as yesterday morning three convicts bolted simultaneously from their party. They were instantly challenged to stop, but as the order was not complied with, the warders fired several shots. One of the runaways fell dead, and another was so badly wounded that he was immediately recaptured, and is now lying in a precarious condition. The third man, named Henry Cattermole, continued his course despite a succession of shots, and was soon beyond range of the rifles. He was pursued for some distance, but was ultimately lost to view in the thick fog which prevailed. A hue and cry was raised, and search parties continued to scour the neighbourhood long after dark, but up to a late hour his recapture had not been effected. Cattermole will be remembered as the man who was sentenced to death some years ago for the murder of Lord Wolborough's game-keeper, near Bury St. Edmund's, but who afterwards received the benefit of the doubt involved in the production of a wad which did not fit the convict's gun. In spite of the successful efforts then made on his behalf, however, the authorities at Portland describe Cattermole as a most daring criminal, and one who is only too likely to prove a danger to the community as long as he remains at large.

Fitch stared stupidly at the words for several minutes after he had read them through; it was the last sentence which at length fell into focus with his seeing eye. Henry Cattermole at large! How long had he been at large? It was a Sunday paper, but the Saturday edition, and this was among the latest news. But it said "yesterday morning," and that meant Friday morning last. So Henry Cattermole had been at large since then, and this was the Sunday evening, and that made nearly three days altogether. Another question now forced itself upon the old man's mind: how far was it from Portland prison to this room?

Like most rustics of his generation, old Fitch had no spare knowledge of geography: he knew his own country-side and the road to London, but that was all. Portland he knew to be on the other side of London; it might be ten miles, might be two hundred; but this he felt in his shuddering heart and shaking bones, that near or far, deep snow or no snow, Henry Cattermole was either recaptured or else on his way to that cottage at that moment.

The feeling sucked the blood from the old man's vessels, even as his lips drained the tumbler he had filled with so light a heart. Then for a little he had spurious courage. He leant back in his chair and laughed aloud, but it sounded strangely in the empty cottage; he looked up at the bell-mouthed gun above the chimney-piece, and that gave him greater confidence, for he kept it loaded. He got up and began to whistle, but stopped in the middle of a bar.

"Curse him!" he said aloud, "they should ha' hanged him, and then I never should ha' been held like this. That'll be a good job if they take an' hang him now, for I fare to feel afraid, I do, as long as Harry Cattermole's alive."

Old Fitch opened his door a moment, saw the thin moon shining on the snow, but no living soul abroad, and for once he was in want of a companion; however, the voices of the choir sounded nearer than ever in the frosty air, and heartened him a little as he shut the door again, turned the heavy key, and shot both bolts well home. He was still stooping over the bottom one, when his eyes fell upon a ragged trouser-leg and a stout stocking planted close behind him. It was instantly joined by another ragged leg and another stout stocking. Neither made a sound, for there were no shoes to the cat-like feet; and the stockings were remarkable for a most conspicuous stripe.

Then old Fitch knew that his enemy had found him out, and he could not stir. He was waiting for a knife to plunge into the centre of his broad, round back; and when a hand slapped him there instead, he thought for a moment he was stabbed indeed. When he knew that he was not, he turned round, still stooping, in a pitiable attitude, and a new shock greeted him. Could this be Henry Cattermole?

The poacher had been stout and thick-set; the convict was gaunt and lean. The one had been florid and youthful; the other was yellow as parchment, and the stubble on the cropped head and on the fleshless jaw was of a leaden grey.

"That— that ain't Harry Cattermole?" the old man whimpered.

"No, that ain't; but 'twas once, and means to be again! Lead the way in beside the fire. I wish you'd sometimes use that front parlour of yours! I've had it to myself this half-hour, and that's cold."

Old Fitch led the way without a word, walked innocently up to the fire, and suddenly sprang for his gun. He never reached it. The barrel of a revolver, screwed round in his ear, drove him reeling across the floor.

"Silly old fool!" hissed Cattermole. "Did you think I'd come to you unarmed? Sit down on that chair before I blow your brains out."

Fitch obeyed.

"I— I can't make out," he stuttered, "why you dare to come to me at all!"

"O' course you can't," said Cattermole, ironically.

"If I'd been you, I'd ha' run anywhere but where I was known so well."

"You would, would you? Then you knew I'd got out, eh, old man?"

"Just been a-reading about it in this here paper."

"I see— I see. I caught a bit o' what you was a-saying to yourself, just as I was thinking it was a safe thing to come out o' that cold parlour o' yours. So that was me you was locking out, was it? Yet you pretend you don't know why I come! You know well enough. You know— you know!"

The convict had seated himself on the kitchen table, and was glaring down on the trembling old man in the chair. He wore a long overcoat, and under it some pitiful rags. The cropped head and the legs swinging in the striped stockings were the only incriminating features, and old Fitch was glancing from the one to the other, wondering why neither had saved him from this horrible interview. Cattermole read his thoughts, and his eyes gleamed.

"So you think I've come all the way in these here, do you?" he cried, tapping one shin. "I tell you I've walked and walked till my bare legs were frozen, and then sat behind a hedge and slipped these on and rubbed them to life again! Where do you think I got these rotten old duds? Off of a scare-crow in a field, I did! I wasn't going to break into no houses and leave my tracks all along the line. But yesterday I got a long lift in a goods train, or I shouldn't be here now; and last night I did crack a crib for this here overcoat and a bit o' supper, and another for the shooter. That didn't so much matter then. I was within twenty mile of you! Of you, you old devil— do you hear?"

Fitch nodded with an ashen face.

"And now do you know why I've come?"

Fitch moistened his blue lips. "To— to murder me!" he whispered, like a dying man.

"That rests with you," said the convict, fondling his weapon.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Confess!"

"Confess what?" whispered Fitch.

"That you swore me away at the trial."

The old man had been holding his breath; he now expelled it with a deep sigh, and taking out a huge red handkerchief, wiped the moisture from his face. Meanwhile, the convict had descried writing-materials on a chiffonier, and placed them on the table beside the brandy-bottle and the tobacco-jar.

"Turn your chair round for writing." Fitch did so. "Now take up your pen and write what I tell you. Don't cock your head and look at me! I hear the psalm-singing as well as you do; they've only just got started, and nobody'll come near us for another hour. Pity you didn't go too, isn't it? Now write what I tell you, word for word, or, so help me, you're a stiff 'un!"

Fitch dipped his pen in the ink. After all, what he was about to write would be written under dire intimidation, and nobody would attach any importance to statements so obtained. He squared his elbows to the task.

"I, Samuel Fitch," began Cattermole, "'do hereby swear and declare before God Almighty'— before God Almighty, have you got that down?— 'that I, Samuel Fitch, did bear false witness against my neighbour, Henry Cattermole, at his trial at Bury Assizes, November 29th, 1887. It is true that I saw both Henry Cattermole and James Savage, his lordship's gamekeeper, in the wood at Wolborough on the night of September 9th in the same year. It is true that I was there by appointment with Savage, as his wife stated in her evidence. It is not true that I heard a shot and heard Savage sing out, 'Harry Cattermole!' as I came up and before ever I had a word with him. That statement was a deliberate fabrication on my part. The real truth is— but hold on! I'm likely going too fast for you— I've had it in my head that long! How much have you got down, eh?"

"Fabrication on my part," repeated old Fitch, in a trembling voice, as he waited for more.

"Good! Now pull yourself together," said Cattermole, suddenly cocking his revolver. "'The real truth is that I, Samuel Fitch, shot James Savage with my own hand!'"

Fitch threw down his pen.

"That's a lie," he gasped. "I never did! I won't write it."

The cocked revolver covered him.

"Prefer to die in your chair, eh? "

"Yes."

"I'll give you one minute by your own watch."

Still covering his man, the convict held out his other hand for the watch, and had momentary contact with a cold, damp one as it dropped into his palm. Cattermole placed the watch upon the table where both could see the dial.

"Your minute begins now," said he; and all at once the watch was ticking like an eight-day clock.

Fitch rolled his head from side to side. "Fifteen seconds," said Cattermole. The old man's brow was white and spangled like the snow outside. "Half-time," said Cattermole. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty seconds passed; then Fitch caught up the pen. "Go on!" he groaned. "I'll write any lie you like; that'll do you no good; no one will believe a word of it." Yet the perspiration was streaming down his face; it splashed upon the paper as he proceeded to write, in trembling characters, at Cattermole's dictation.

"The real truth is that I, Samuel Fitch, shot James Savage with my own hand. The circumstances that led to my shooting him I will confess and explain hereafter. When he had fallen I heard a shout and someone running up. I got behind a tree, but I saw Harry Cattermole, the poacher, trip clean over the body. His gun went off in the air, and when he tried to get up again, I saw he couldn't because he'd twisted his ankle. He never saw me; I slipped away and gave my false evidence, and Harry Cattermole was caught escaping from the wood on his hands and knees,

with blood upon his hands and clothes, and an empty gun. I gave evidence against him to stop him giving evidence against me. But this is the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God!"

Cattermole paused, Fitch finished writing; again the eyes of the two men met; and those of the elder gleamed with a cunning curiosity.

"How— how did you know?" he asked, lowering his voice and leaning forward as he spoke.

"Two and two," was the reply. "I put 'em together as soon as ever I saw you in the box."

"That'll never be believed— not like this."

"Will it not? Wait a bit; you've not done yet. 'As a proof of what I say '— do you hear me?— 'as a proof of what I say, the gun which the wad will fit, that saved Henry Cattermole's life, will be found—' "

Cattermole waited until the old man had caught him up.

"Now," said he, "you finish the sentence for yourself!"

"What?" cried Fitch.

"Write where that gun's to be found— you know— I don't— and then sign your name!"

"But I don't know—"

"You do."

"I sold it!"

"You wouldn't dare. You've got that somewhere, I see it in your face. Write down where, and then show me the place; and if you've told a lie— "

The revolver was within a foot of the old man's head, which had fallen forward between his hands. The pen lay blotting the wet paper. Cattermole took the brandy-bottle, poured out a stiff dram, and pushed it under the other's nose.

"Drink! " he cried. "Then write the truth, and sign your name. Maybe they won't hang an old man like you; but, by God, I sha'n't think twice about shooting you if you don't write the truth!"

Fitch gulped down the brandy, took up the pen once more, and was near the end of his own death-warrant, when the convict sprang lightly from the table and stood listening in the centre of the room. Fitch saw him, and listened too. In the church they were singing another hymn; the old man saw by his watch, still lying on the table, that it must be the last hymn, and in a few minutes his wife would be back. But that was not all. There was another sound— a nearer sound— the sound of voices outside the door. The handle was turned— the door pushed— but Fitch himself had locked and bolted it. More whispers; then a loud rat-tat.

"Who is it?" cried Fitch, trembling with excitement, as he started to his feet.

"The police! Let us in, or we break in your door! "

There was no answer. Cattermole was watching the door; suddenly he turned, and there was Fitch in the act of dropping his written confession into the fire. The

convict seized it before it caught, and with the other hand hurled the old man back into his chair.

"Finish it," he said below his breath, "or you're a dead man! One or other of us is going to swing! Now, then, under the floor of what room did you hide the gun? Let them hammer, the door is strong. What room was it? Ah, your bedroom! Now sign your name."

A deafening crash; the lock had given; only the bolt held firm.

"Sign!" shrieked Cattermole. A cold ring pressed the old man's temple. He signed his name, and fell forward on the table in a dead faint.

Cattermole blotted the confession, folded it up, strode over to the door, and smilingly flung it open to his pursuers.

21. The Problem of the Perfect Alibi

Jacques Futrelle

1873-1912

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PATROLMAN Gillis was standing idly on a corner, within the light-radius of a street lamp debating some purely personal questions when he heard the steady clack, clack, clack of foot-steps a block or more away. He glanced up and dimly he saw a man approaching. As he came nearer the policeman noticed that the man's right hand was pressed to his face.

"Good evening, officer," said the stranger nervously. "Can you tell me where I can find a dentist?"

"Toothache?" inquired the policeman.

"Yes, and it's nearly killing me," was the reply. "If I don't get it pulled I'll— I'll go crazy."

The policeman grinned sympathetically.

"Had it myself— I know what it is," he said. "You passed one dentist down in the other block, but there's another just across the street here," and he indicated a row of brown-stone residences. "Dr. Paul Sitgreaves. He'll charge you good and plenty."

"Thank you," said the other.

He crossed the street and the policeman gazed after him until he mounted the steps and pulled the bell. After a few minutes the door opened, the stranger entered the house and Patrolman Gillis walked on.

"Dr. Sitgreaves here?" inquired the stranger of a servant who answered the bell.

"Yes."

"Please ask him if he can draw a tooth for me. I'm in a perfect agony, and—"

"The doctor rarely gets up to attend to such cases," interrupted the servant.

"Here," said the stranger and he pressed a bill in the servant's hand. "Wake him for me, won't you? Tell him it's urgent."

The servant looked at the bill, then opened the door and led the patient into the reception room.

Five minutes later, Dr. Sitgreaves, gaping ostentatiously, entered and nodded to his caller.

"I hated to trouble you, doctor," explained the stranger, "but I haven't slept a wink all night."

He glanced around the room until his eye fell upon a clock. Dr. Sitgreaves glanced in that direction. The hands of the clock pointed to 1:53.

"Phew!" said Dr. Sitgreaves. "Nearly two o'clock. I must have slept hard. I didn't think I'd been asleep more than an hour." He paused to gape again and stretch himself. "Which tooth is it?" he asked.

"A molar, here," said the stranger, and he opened his mouth.

Dr. Sitgreaves gazed officially into his innermost depths and fingered the hideous instruments of torture.

"That tooth's too good to lose," he said after an examination. "There's only a small cavity in it."

"I don't know what's the matter with it," replied the other impatiently, "except that it hurts. My nerves are fairly jumping."

Dr. Sitgreaves was professionally serious as he noted the drawn face, the nervous twitching of hands and the unusual pallor of his client.

"They are," he said finally. "There's no doubt of that. But it isn't the tooth. It's neuralgia."

"Well, pull it anyway," pleaded the stranger. "It always comes in that tooth, and I've got to get rid of it some time."

"It wouldn't be wise," remonstrated the dentist. "A filling will save it. Here," and he turned and stirred an effervescent powder in a glass. "Take this and see if it doesn't straighten you out."

The stranger took the glass and gulped down the foaming liquid.

"Now sit right there for five minutes or so," instructed the dentist. "If it doesn't quiet you and you insist on having the tooth pulled, of course—"

He sat down and glanced again at the clock after which he looked at his watch and replaced it in a pocket of his pajamas. His visitor was sitting, too, controlling himself only with an obvious effort.

"This is real neuralgia weather," observed the dentist at last, idly. "Misty and damp."

"I suppose so," was the reply. "This began to hurt about twelve o'clock, just as I went to bed, and finally it got so bad that I couldn't stand it. Then I got up and dressed and came out for a walk. I kept on, thinking that it would get better but it didn't and a policeman sent me here."

There was a pause of several minutes.

"Feel any better?" inquired the dentist, at last.

"No," was the reply. "I think you'd better take it out."

"Just as you say!"

The offending tooth was drawn, the stranger paid him with a sigh of relief, and after a minute or so started out. At the door he turned back.

"What time is it now, please?" he asked.

"Seventeen minutes past two," replied the dentist.

"Thanks," said the stranger. "I'll just have time to catch a car back home."

"Good night," said the dentist.

"Good night."

SKULKING along through the dense gloom, impalpably a part of the murky mist which pressed down between tall board fences on each side, moved the figure of a man. Occasionally he shot a glance behind him, but the general direction of his gaze was to his left, where a fence cut off the small back-yards of an imposing row of brown-stone residences. At last he stopped and tried a gate. It opened noiselessly and he disappeared inside. A pause. A man came out of the gate, closed it carefully and walked on through the alley toward an arc-light which spread a generous glare at the intersection of a street.

NEXT MORNING at eight o'clock, Paul Randolph De Forrest, a young man of some social prominence, was found murdered in the sitting room of his suite in the big Avon apartment house. He had been dead for several hours. He sat beside his desk, and death left him sprawled upon it face downward. The weapon was one of several curious daggers which had been used ornamentally on the walls of his apartments. The blade missed the heart only a quarter of an inch or so; death must have come within a couple of minutes.

Detective Mallory went to the apartments, accompanied by the Medical Examiner. Together they lifted the dead man. Beneath his body, on the desk, lay a sheet of paper on which were scrawled a few words; a pencil was clutched tightly in his right hand. The detective glanced then stared at the paper; it startled him. In the scrawly, trembling, incoherent handwriting of the dying man were these disjointed sentences and words:

"Murdered... Franklin Chase... quarrel... stabbed me... am dying... God help me... clock striking 2... good-bye."

The detective's jaws snapped as he read. Here was crime, motive and time. After a sharp scrutiny of the apartments, he went down the single flight of stairs to the office floor to make some inquiries. An elevator man, Moran, was the first person questioned. He had been on duty the night before. Did he know Mr. Franklin Chase? Yes. Had Mr. Franklin Chase called to see Mr. De Forrest on the night before? Yes.

"What time was he here?"

"About half past eleven, I should say. He and Mr. De Forrest came in together from the theatre."

"When did Mr. Chase go away?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't see him."

"It might have been somewhere near two o'clock?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Moran again, "I'll— I'll tell you all I know about it. I was on duty all night. Just before two o'clock a telegram was 'phoned for a Mr. Thomas on the third floor. I took it and wrote on it the time that I received it. It

was then just six minutes before two o'clock. I walked up from this floor to the third— two flights— to give the message to Mr. Thomas. As I passed Mr. De Forrest's door, I heard loud voices, two people evidently quarrelling. I paid no attention then but went on. I was at Mr. Thomas's door possibly five or six minutes. When I came down I heard nothing further and thought no more of it."

"You fix the time of passing Mr. De Forrest's door first at, say, five minutes of two?" asked the detective.

"Within a minute of that time, yes, sir."

"And again about two or a minute or so after?"

"Yes."

"Ah," exclaimed the detective. "That fits in exactly with the other and establishes beyond question the moment of the murder." He was thinking of the words "clock striking 2" written by the dying man. "Did you recognize the voices?"

"No, sir, I could not. They were not very clear."

That was the substance of Moran's story. Detective Mallory then called at the telegraph office and indisputable records there showed that they had telephoned a message for Mr. Thomas at precisely six minutes of two. Detective Mallory was satisfied.

Within an hour Franklin Chase was under arrest. Detective Mallory found him sound asleep in his room in a boarding house less than a block away from the Avon. He seemed somewhat astonished when informed of his arrest for murder, but was quite calm.

"It's some sort of a mistake," he protested.

"I don't make mistakes," said the detective. He had a short memory.

Further police investigation piled up the evidence against the prisoner. For instance, minute blood stains were found on his hands, and a drop or so on the clothing he had worn the night before; and it was established by three fellow lodgers— young men who had come in late and stopped at his room— that he was not in his boarding house at two o'clock the night before.

That afternoon Chase was arraigned for a preliminary hearing. Detective Mallory stated the case and his statement was corroborated by necessary witnesses. First he established the authenticity of the dying man's writing. Then he proved that Chase had been with De Forrest at half past eleven o'clock; that there had been a quarrel— or argument— in De Forrest's room just before two o'clock; and finally, with a dramatic flourish, he swore to the blood stains on the prisoner's hands and clothing.

The august Court stared at the prisoner and took up his pen to sign the necessary commitment.

"May I say something before we go any further?" asked Mr. Chase.

The Court mumbled some warning about anything the prisoner might say being used against him.

"I understand," said the accused, and he nodded, "but I will show that there has been a mistake— a serious mistake. I admit that the writing was Mr. De Forrest's; that I was with him at half past eleven o'clock and that the stains on my hands and clothing were blood stains."

The Court stared.

"I've known Mr. De Forrest for several years," the prisoner went on quietly. "I met him at the theatre last night and walked home with him. We reached the Avon about half past eleven o'clock and I went to his room but I remained only ten or fifteen minutes. Then I went home. It was about five minutes of twelve when I reached my room. I went to bed and remained in bed until one o'clock, when for a reason which will appear, I arose, dressed and went out, say about ten minutes past one. I returned to my room a few minutes past three."

Detective Mallory smiled sardonically.

"When I was arrested this morning I sent notes to three persons," the prisoner went on steadily. "Two of these happen to be city officials, one the City Engineer. Will he please come forward?"

There was a little stir in the room and the Court scratched one ear gravely. City Engineer Malcolm appeared inquiringly.

"This is Mr. Malcolm?" asked the prisoner. "Yes? Here is a map of the city issued by your office. I would like to ask please the approximate distance between this point—" and he indicated on the map the location of the Avon— "and this." He touched another point far removed.

The City Engineer studied the map carefully.

"At least two and a half miles," he explained.

"You would make that statement on oath?"

"Yes, I've surveyed it myself."

"Thank you," said the prisoner, courteously, and he turned to face the crowd in the rear. "Is Policeman No. 1122 in Court?— I don't know his name?"

Again there was a stir, and Policeman Gillis came forward.

"Do you remember me?" inquired the prisoner.

"Sure," was the reply.

"Where did you see me last night?"

"At this corner," and Gillis put his finger down on the map at the second point the prisoner had indicated.

The Court leaned forward eagerly to peer at the map; Detective Mallory tugged violently at his moustache. Into the prisoner's manner there came tense anxiety.

"Do you know what time you saw me there?" he asked.

Policeman Gillis was thoughtful a moment.

"No," he replied at last. "I heard a clock strike just after I saw you but I didn't notice."

The prisoner's face went deathly white for an instant, then he recovered himself with an effort.

"You didn't count the strokes?" he asked.

"No, I wasn't paying any attention to it."

The colour rushed back into Chase's face and he was silent a moment. Then:

"It was two o'clock you heard strike?" It was hardly a question, rather a statement.

"I don't know," said Gillis. "It might have been. Probably was."

"What did I say to you?"

"You asked me where you could find a dentist, and I directed you to Dr. Sitgreaves across the street."

"You saw me enter Dr. Sitgreaves' house?"

"Yes."

The accused glanced up at the Court and that eminent jurist proceeded to look solemn.

"Dr. Sitgreaves, please?" called the prisoner.

The dentist appeared, exchanging nods with the prisoner.

"You remember me, doctor?"

"Yes."

"May I ask you to tell the Court where you live? Show us on this map please."

Dr. Sitgreaves put his finger down at the spot which had been pointed out by the prisoner and by Policeman Gillis, two and a half miles from the Avon.

"I live three doors from this corner," explained the dentist.

"You pulled a tooth for me last night?" went on the prisoner.

"Yes."

"Here?" and the prisoner opened his mouth.

The dentist gazed down him.

"Yes," he replied.

"You may remember, doctor," went on the prisoner, quietly, "that you had occasion to notice the clock just after I called at your house. Do you remember what time it was?"

"A few minutes before two— seven or eight minutes, I think."

Detective Mallory and the Court exchanged bewildered glances.

"You looked at your watch, too. Was that exactly with the clock?"

"Yes, within a minute."

"And what time did I leave your office?" the prisoner asked.

"Seventeen minutes past two— I happen to remember," was the reply.

The prisoner glanced dreamily around the room twice, his eyes met Detective Mallory's. He stared straight into that official for an instant then turned back to the dentist.

"When you drew the tooth there was blood of course. It is possible that I got the stains on my fingers and clothing?"

"Yes, certainly."

The prisoner turned to the Court and surprised a puzzled expression on that official countenance.

"Is anything else necessary?" he inquired courteously. "It has been established that the moment of the crime was two o'clock; I have shown by three witnesses—two of them city officials— that I was two and a half miles away in less than half an hour; I couldn't have gone on a car in less than fifteen minutes— hardly that."

There was a long silence as the Court considered the matter. Finally he delivered himself, briefly.

"It resolves itself into a question of the accuracy of the clocks," he said. "The accuracy of the clock at the Avon is attested by the known accuracy of the clock in the telegraph office, while it seems established that Dr. Sitgreaves' clock was also accurate, because it was with his watch. Of course there is no question of veracity of witnesses— it is merely a question of the clock in Dr. Sitgreaves' office. If that is shown to be absolutely correct we must accept the alibi."

The prisoner turned to the elevator man from the Avon.

"What sort of a clock was that you mentioned?"

"An electric clock, regulated from Washington Observatory," was the reply.

"And the clock at the telegraph office, Mr. Mallory?"

"An electric clock, regulated from Washington Observatory."

"And yours, Dr. Sitgreaves?"

"An electric clock, regulated from Washington Observatory."

The prisoner remained in his cell until seven o'clock that evening while experts tested the three clocks. They were accurate to the second; and it was explained that there could have been no variation of either without this variation showing in the delicate testing apparatus. Therefore it came to pass that Franklin Chase was released on his own recognizance, while Detective Mallory wandered off into the sacred precincts of his private office to hold his head in his hands and think.

Hutchinson Hatch, reporter, had followed the intricacies of the mystery from the discovery of De Forrest's body, through the preliminary hearing, up to and including the expert examination of the clocks, which immediately preceded the release of Franklin Chase. When this point was reached his mental condition was not unlike that of Detective Mallory— he was groping hopelessly, blindly in the mazes of the problem.

It was then that he called to see Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen— The Thinking Machine. That distinguished gentleman listened to a recital of the known facts with petulant, drooping mouth and the everlasting squint in his blue eyes. As the reporter talked on, corrugations appeared in the logician's expansive brow,

and these gave way in turn to a net-work of wrinkles. At the end The Thinking Machine sat twiddling his long fingers and staring upward.

"This is one of the most remarkable cases that has come to my attention," he said at last, "because it possesses the unusual quality of being perfect in each way— that is the evidence against Mr. Chase is perfect and the alibi he offers is perfect. But we know instantly that if Mr. Chase killed Mr. De Forrest there *was* something the matter with the clocks despite expert opinion.

"We *know* that as certainly as we know that two and two make four, not *some* times but *all* the time, because our reason tells us that Mr. Chase was not in two places at once at two o'clock. Therefore we must assume either one of two things— that something was the matter with the clocks— and if there was we must assume that Mr. Chase was responsible for it— or that Mr. Chase had nothing whatever to do with Mr. De Forrest's death, at least personally."

The last word aroused Hatch to a new and sudden interest. It suggested a line of thought which had not yet occurred to him.

"Now," continued the scientist, "if we can find one flaw in Mr. Chase's story we will have achieved the privilege of temporarily setting aside his defence and starting over. If, on the contrary, he told the full and exact truth and our investigation proves that he did, it instantly clears him. Now just what have you done, please?"

"I talked to Dr. Sitgreaves," replied Hatch. "He did not know Chase— never saw him until he pulled the tooth, and then didn't know his name. But he told me really more than appeared in court, for instance, that his watch had been regulated only a few days ago, that it had been accurate since, and that he knew it was accurate next day because he kept an important engagement. That being accurate the clock must be accurate, because they were together almost to the second.

"I also talked to every other person whose name appears in the case. I questioned them as to all sorts of possibilities, and the result was that I was compelled to accept the alibi— not that I'm unwilling to of course, but it seems peculiar that De Forrest should have written the name as he was dying."

"You talked to the young men who went into Mr. Chase's room at two o'clock?" inquired The Thinking Machine casually.

"Yes."

"Did you ask either of them the condition of Mr. Chase's bed when they went in?"

"Yes," replied the reporter. "I see what you mean. They agreed that it was tumbled as if someone had been in it."

The Thinking Machine raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Suppose, Mr. Hatch, that you had a violent toothache," he asked after a moment, still casually, "and were looking for relief, would you stop to notice the number of a policeman who told you where there was a dentist's office?"

Hatch considered it calmly, as he stared into the inscrutable face of the scientist.

"Oh, I see," he said at last. "No, I hardly think so, and yet I might."

Later Hatch and The Thinking Machine, by permission of Detective Mallory, made an exhaustive search of De Forrest's apartments in the Avon, seeking some clue. When the Thinking Machine went down the single flight of stairs to the office he seemed deeply perplexed.

"Where is your clock?" he inquired of the elevator man.

"In the inside office, opposite the telephone booth," was the reply.

The scientist went in and taking a stool, clambered up and squinted fiercely into the very face of the timepiece. He said "Ah!" once, non-committally, then clambered down.

"It would not be possible for anyone here to see a person pass through the hall," he mused. "Now," and he picked up a telephone book, "just a word with Dr. Sitgreaves."

He asked the dentist only two questions and their nature caused Hatch to smile. The first was:

"You have a pocket in the shirt of your pajamas?"

"Yes," came the wondering reply.

"And when you are called at night you pick up your watch and put it in that pocket?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. Good-bye."

Then The Thinking Machine turned to Hatch.

"We are safe in believing," he said, "that Mr. De Forrest was not killed by a thief, because his valuables were undisturbed, therefore we must believe that the person who killed him was an acquaintance. It would be unfair to act hastily, so I shall ask you to devote three or four days to getting this man's history in detail; see his friends and enemies, find out all about him, his life, his circumstances, his love affairs— all those things."

Hatch nodded; he was accustomed to receiving large orders from The Thinking Machine.

"If you uncover nothing in that line to suggest another line of investigation I will give you the name of the person who killed him and an arrest will follow. The murderer will not run away. The solution of the affair is quite clear, unless—" he emphasized the word—"unless some unknown fact gives it another turn."

Hatch was forced to be content with that and for the specified four days laboured arduously and vainly. Then he returned to The Thinking Machine and summed up results briefly in one word: "Nothing."

The Thinking Machine went out and was gone two hours. When he returned he went straight to the 'phone and called Detective Mallory. The detective appeared after a few minutes.

"Have one of your men go at once and arrest Mr. Chase," The Thinking Machine instructed. "You might explain to him that there is new evidence— an eye witness if you like. But don't mention my name or this place to him. Anyway bring him here and I'll show you the flaw in the perfect alibi he set up!"

Detective Mallory started to ask questions.

"It comes down simply to this," interrupted The Thinking Machine impatiently. "Somebody killed Mr. De Forrest and that being true it must be that that somebody can be found. Please, when Mr. Chase comes here do not interrupt me, and introduce me to him as an important new witness."

An hour later Franklin Chase entered with Detective Mallory. He was somewhat pale and nervous and in his eyes lay a shadow of apprehension. Over it all was the gloss of ostentatious nonchalance and self control. There were introductions. Chase started visibly at actual reference to the "important new witness."

"An eye witness," added The Thinking Machine.

Positive fright came into Chase's manner and he quailed under the steady scrutiny of the narrow blue eyes. The Thinking Machine dropped back into his chair and pressed his long, white fingers tip to tip.

"If you'll just follow me a moment, Mr. Chase," he suggested at last. "You know Dr. Sitgreaves, of course? Yes. Well, it just happens that I have a room a block or so away from his house around the corner. These are Mr. Hatch's apartments." He stated it so convincingly that there was no possibility of doubt. "Now my room faces straight up an alley which runs directly back of Dr. Sitgreaves's house. There is an electric light at the corner."

Chase started to say something, gulped, then was silent.

"I was in my room the night of Mr. De Forrest's murder," went on the scientist, "and was up moving about because I, too, had a toothache. It just happened that I glanced out my front window." His tone had been courteous in the extreme; now it hardened perceptibly. "I saw you, Mr. Chase, come along the street, stop at the alley, glance around and then go into the alley. *I saw your face clearly* under the electric light, and that was *at twenty minutes to three o'clock*. Detective Mallory has just learned of this fact and I have signified my willingness to go on the witness stand and swear to it."

The accused man was deathly white now; his face was working strangely, but still he was silent. It was only by a supreme effort that he restrained himself.

"I saw you open a gate and go into the back yard of Dr. Sitgreaves's house," resumed The Thinking Machine. "Five minutes or so later you came out and walked on to the cross street, where you disappeared. Naturally I wondered what it meant. It was still in my mind about half past three o'clock, possibly later, when I saw you enter the alley again, disappear in the same yard, then come out and go away."

"I— I was not— not there," said Chase weakly. "You were— were mistaken."

"When we know," continued The Thinking Machine steadily, "that you entered that house *before* you entered by the front door, we *know* that you tampered with Dr. Sitgreaves's watch and clock, and when we know that you tampered with those we know that you murdered Mr. De Forrest as his dying note stated. Do you see it?"

Chase arose suddenly and paced feverishly back and forth across the room; Detective Mallory discreetly moved his chair in front of the door. Chase saw and understood.

"I know how you tampered with the clock so as not to interfere with its action or cause any variation at the testing apparatus. You were too superbly clever to stop it, or interfere with the circuit. Therefore I see that you simply took out the pin which held on the hands and moved them backward one hour. It was then actually a quarter of three— you made it a quarter of two. You showed your daring by invading the dentist's sleeping room. You found his watch on a table beside his bed, set that with the clock, then went out, spoke to Policeman Gillis whose number you noted and rang the front door bell. After you left by the front door you allowed time for the household to get quiet again, then re-entered from the rear and reset the watch and clock. Thus your alibi was perfect. You took desperate chances and you knew it, but it was necessary."

The Thinking Machine stopped and squinted up into the pallid face. Chase made a hopeless gesture with his hands and sat down, burying his face.

"It was clever, Mr. Chase," said the scientist finally. "It is the only murder case I know where the criminal made no mistake. You probably killed Mr. De Forrest in a fit of anger, left there while the elevator boy was upstairs, then saw the necessity of protecting yourself and devised this alibi at the cost of one tooth. Your only real danger was when you made Patrolman Gillis your witness, taking the desperate chance that he did not know or would not remember just when you spoke to him."

Again there was silence. Finally Chase looked up with haggard face.

"How did you know all this?" he asked.

"Because under the exact circumstances, nothing else *could* have happened," replied the scientist. "The simplest rules of logic proved conclusively that this did happen." He straightened up in the chair. "By the way," he asked, "what was the motive of the murder?"

"Don't you know?" asked Chase, quickly.

"No."

"Then you never will," declared Chase, grimly.

When Chase had gone with the detective, Hatch lingered with The Thinking Machine.

"It's perfectly astonishing," he said. "How did you get at it anyway?"

"I visited the neighbourhood, saw how it could have been done, learned through your investigation that no one else appeared in the case, then, knowing that this must have happened, tricked Mr. Chase into believing I was an eye witness to the incident in the alley. That was the only way to make him confess. Of course there was no one else in it."

One of the singular points in the Chase murder trial was that while the prisoner was convicted of murder on his own statement no inkling of a motive ever appeared.

22: The Affair of the Ivory Boxes

Percy J. Brebner

1864-1922

The Weekly Tale-Teller, 16 Nov 1912

Collected in: *Christopher Quarles: College Professor and Master Detective*, 1914

The first "Christopher Quarles" story

THERE WAS a substantial aspect about Blenheim Square, not of that monotonous type which characterizes so many London squares, but a certain grace and consciousness of well-being.

The houses, though maintaining some uniformity, possessed individuality, and in the season were gay with window-boxes and flowers; the garden in the center was not too stereotyped in its arrangement, and plenty of sunlight found its way into it. The inhabitants were people of ample means, and the address was undoubtedly a good one. There was no slum in close proximity, that seamy background which so constantly lies behind a fair exterior of life; it was seldom that any but respectable people were seen in the square, for hawkers and itinerant musicians were forbidden; and, beyond a wedding or a funeral at intervals, nothing exciting ever seemed to happen there.

It looked particularly attractive when I entered it one spring morning early and made my way to No. 12.

As I approached the house and noted that the square was still asleep, an old gentleman, clad in a long and rather rusty overcoat, shuffled toward me from the opposite direction. He wore round goggles behind which his eyes looked unusually large, and a wide-awake hat was drawn over his silver locks.

He stopped in front of me and, without a word, brought his hand from his pocket and gave me a card.

"Christopher Quarles," I said, reading from the bit of pasteboard.

"My name. What is yours?"

"Murray Wigan," I answered, and the next instant was wondering why I had told him.

"Ah, I do not fancy we have met before, Detective Wigan. Perhaps we may help each other."

"You knew Mr. Ratcliffe?" I asked.

"No, but I have heard of him."

"I am afraid that—"

He laid two fingers of a lean hand on my arm.

"You had better. It will be wise."

A sharp retort came to my tongue, but remained unspoken. I can hardly explain why, because in an ordinary way his manner would only have increased my resentment and obstinacy.

I was young, only just over thirty, but success had brought me some fame and unlimited self-confidence. I was an enthusiast, and have been spoken of as a born detective, but the line of life I had chosen had sadly disappointed my father. He had given me an excellent education, and had looked forward to his son making a name for himself, but certainly not as a mere policeman, which was his way of putting it.

Indeed, family relations were strained even at this time, a fact which may have accounted for that hardness of character which people, even my friends, seemed to find in me.

My nature and my pride in my profession were therefore assailed by the old man's manner, yet the sharp answer remained unspoken.

"You will find that I am known to your people," he added while I hesitated.

I did not believe him for a moment, but there was something so compelling in the steady gaze from the large eyes behind the goggles that I grudgingly allowed him to enter the house with me.

Early that morning, before the first milk-cart had rattled through Blenheim Square, Constable Plowman had been called to No. 12 by the cook-housekeeper, who had found her master, Mr. Ratcliffe, dead in his study. Plowman had at once sent for a doctor and communicated with Scotland Yard. The doctor had arrived before me, but nothing had been moved by the constable, and the housekeeper declared that the room was exactly as she had found it.

The study was at the back of the house, a small room lined with books. In the center was a writing table, an electric lamp on it was still burning, and, leaning back in his chair, his eyes fixed on vacancy, sat Mr. Ratcliffe. The doctor said he had been dead some hours.

On the blotting-pad immediately in front of him was a large blue stone— a sapphire— and arranged in a rough semicircle round the pad were the various boxes of one of those Chinese curiosities in which box is contained within box until the last is quite small.

They were of thin ivory, the largest being some three inches square, the smallest not an inch, and they were arranged in order of size. There was no confusion in the room, no sign of violence on the dead man. Curtains were drawn across the window, which was open a little at the top.

At first my attention was somewhat divided; the old man interested me as well as the case.

He looked closely into the face of the dead man, then glanced at the curtained window, and nodded his head in a sagacious way, as if he had already fathomed

the mystery. He looked at the sapphire and at the semicircle of boxes, but he did not attempt to touch anything, nor did he say a word.

Well, it is easy enough to look wise; it is when a man opens his mouth that the test begins. I came to the conclusion that he was a venerable fraud, and that I had been a fool to let him come in. I dismissed him from my mind and commenced my own investigations.

On the window-sill there were marks which made it practically certain that someone had entered the room that way, but neither then nor later could I discover any footprints in the small garden which was some eight feet below the window.

The housekeeper, who had been with Mr. Ratcliffe a dozen years, explained that, on coming down that morning, she had gone into the study to draw the curtains as usual. The room was exactly as we saw it. Her master spent most of his time in his study when he was at home, and seemed to enjoy his own company. He went little into society, but a friend sometimes dined with him; indeed, his nephew, Captain Ratcliffe, had dined with him last night.

She had gone to bed before the captain left, and did not hear him go. She would not admit that her master was peculiar or eccentric in any way, but said he had seemed worried and rather depressed lately. The slightest noise in the house disturbed him, and she fancied he had got into the habit of listening for noises, for once or twice she had come upon him in a listening attitude. She knew nothing about the sapphire, and had never seen the ivory boxes before.

The old man never asked a question; I do not think he said a single word until we were leaving the house, and then he remarked in a casual manner:

"A curious case, Detective Wigan."

"Some curious points in it," I said.

I was glad when the old fellow had shuffled off. He was a disturbing influence. His eyes behind those goggles seemed to have a paralyzing effect upon me. I could not think clearly.

Certainly there were many curious points in the case, and my inquiries quickly added to the number.

Mr. Ratcliffe had traveled extensively, was a linguist, and a far richer man than his neighbors had supposed. Collecting precious stones had been his hobby, and in a case deposited with his bankers there were many valuable, and some unique, gems. Probably he had others with him in the house, but none were found except the sapphire lying on the blotting-pad. Robbers might have taken them, the marks on the window-sill were suggestive, but I was doubtful on this point. Even if robbers had entered the room, how was Mr. Ratcliffe's death to be accounted for? There was no mark upon the body, there was no trace of poison. The doctors declared he was in a perfectly healthy condition. There was no apparent reason

for his death. Besides, if he had been robbed of his jewels, why should the sapphire have been left?

It was only natural, perhaps, that suspicion should fall upon the dead man's nephew. Might he not have left the house by the window? it was asked. I had put the same question to myself.

Captain Ratcliffe's behavior, however, was not that of a guilty man, although there were certain things which told against him.

He answered questions frankly and without hesitation. He was in a line regiment, and was somewhat heavily in debt. It was close upon midnight when he left his uncle, he said, and they had not gone into the study at all. They had sat smoking and talking in the dining room, and just before he left they had both had a little whisky. The empty glasses and the cigar ends in the dining room went to confirm this statement.

He knew about his uncle's hobby for stones, was surprised to find that he was such a rich man, and declared that he had no idea he was his heir. Mr. Ratcliffe had never helped him in any way; in fact, that very night he had refused, not unkindly but quite frankly, to lend him a sum of money he had asked for.

There had been no quarrel, and they had parted excellent friends.

I am convinced that a large section of the public wondered why Captain Ratcliffe was not arrested, and possibly some detectives would have considered there was sufficient evidence against him to take this course. I did not, although I had him watched.

The fact was that Christopher Quarles lurked at the back of my mind. I found that he had spoken the truth when he said that he was known at Scotland Yard. He was a professor of philosophy, and some two years ago had made what seemed a perfectly preposterous suggestion in a case which had puzzled the police, with the result that he had been instrumental in saving an innocent man from the gallows. A chance success was the comment of the authorities; my own idea was that he must have had knowledge which he ought not to possess. Now it might prove useful to cultivate the acquaintance of this mysterious professor, so I called upon him one morning in his house at West Street, Chelsea, as keen upon a difficult trail as I had ever been in my life.

The servant said the professor was at home and requested me to follow her.

Through open doors I had a glimpse of taste and luxury— softly carpeted rooms, old furniture, good pictures— and then the servant opened a door at the extreme end of the hall and announced me.

Astonishment riveted me to the threshold for the moment. Except for a cheap writing-table in the window, a big arm-chair by the fireplace, and two or three common chairs against the wall, this room was empty. There was no carpet on the floor, not a picture on the whitewashed walls. The window had a blind, but no

curtains; there were no books, and the appointments of the writing-table were of the simplest kind possible.

"Ah, I have been expecting you," said Quarles, crossing from the window to welcome me.

A skull-cap covered his silver locks, but he wore no glasses, and to-day there were few signs of age or deterioration of physical or mental force about him. His shuffling gait when he had met me in Blenheim Square that morning had evidently been assumed, and probably he had worn glasses to conceal some of the expression of his face.

"You had been expecting me?" I said.

"Two days ago I gave the servant instructions to bring you in whenever you came. Zena, my dear, this is Detective Wigan— my granddaughter who often assists me in my work."

I bowed to the girl who had risen from the chair at the writing-table, and for a moment forgot the professor— and, indeed, everything else in the world. Since no woman had ever yet succeeded in touching any sympathetic chord in me, it may be assumed that she was remarkable. In that bare room she looked altogether out of place, and yet her presence transformed it into a desirable spot.

"You are full of surprises, professor," I said, with a keen desire to make myself agreeable. "I enter your house and have a glimpse of luxury through open doors, yet I find you in— in an empty room; you tell me I am expected, when until a few hours ago I had not determined to call upon you; and now you further mystify me by saying this lady is your helper."

"Philosophy is mysterious," he answered, "and I am interested in all the ramifications of my profession. To understand one science perfectly means having a considerable knowledge of all other sciences."

"My grandfather exaggerates my usefulness," said the girl.

"I do not," he returned. "Your questions have constantly shown me the right road to travel, and to have the right road pointed out is half the battle. Sit down, Mr. Wigan— in the arm-chair— no, I prefer sitting here myself. Zena and I were talking of Blenheim Square when you came in. A coincidence? Perhaps, but it may be something more. In these days we are loath to admit there are things we do not understand. This case puzzles you?"

The detective in me was coming slowly uppermost again, and I remembered the line I had decided to take with this curious old gentleman.

"It does. From first to last I am puzzled. To begin with, how came you to hear of the tragedy that you were able to be upon the scene so promptly?"

"Are you here as a spy or to ask for help? Come, a plain answer," said Quarles hotly, as though he were resenting an insult.

"Dear!" said the girl soothingly.

"Zena considers you honest," said the old man, suddenly calm again. "My helper, as I told you, and not always of my opinion. Let that pass. You are a young man with much to learn. I am not a detective, but a philosopher, and sometimes an investigator of human motives. If a mystery interests me I endeavor to solve it for my own satisfaction, but there it ends. I never give my opinion unless it is asked for, nor should I interfere except to prevent a miscarriage of justice. If this is clear to you, you may proceed and tell me what you have done, how far you have gone in the unraveling of this case; if you are not satisfied, I have nothing more to say to you except 'Good morning!'"

For a moment I hesitated, then shortly I told him what I had done, and he listened attentively.

"I have always worked alone," I went on, "not without success, as you may know. In this case I am beaten so far, and I come to you."

"Why?"

"For two reasons. First— you will forgive my mentioning it again— your prompt arrival puzzled me; secondly, I believe in Captain Ratcliffe, and am anxious to relieve him of the suspicion which undoubtedly rests upon him."

The old man rubbed his head through his skull-cap.

"You would like to find some reason to be suspicious of me?"

"Mr. Wigan does not mean that, dear," said Zena.

The professor shook his head doubtfully.

"Crime as crime does not interest me. It is only when I am impelled to study a case, against my will sometimes, that I become keen; and, whenever this happens, the solution of the mystery is likely to be unusual. My methods are not those of a detective. You argue from facts; I am more inclined to form a theory, and then look for facts to fit it. Not a scientific way, you may say, but a great many scientists do it, although they would strenuously deny the fact. I can show you how the facts support my theory, but I cannot always produce the actual proof. In many cases I should be a hindrance rather than a help to you."

"It is courteous of you to say so," I returned, wishing to be pleasant.

"It is quite true, not a compliment," said the girl.

"First, the dead man," Quarles went on. "Quite a healthy man was the medical opinion— but his eyes. Did you particularly notice his eyes? You look into the brain through the eyes, see into it with great penetration if you have accustomed yourself to such scrutiny as I have done. Mr. Ratcliffe had not been dead long enough for his eyes to lose that last impression received from the brain. They were still looking at something, as it were, and they still had terror in them. Now he was a traveler, one who must have faced danger scores of times; it would take something very unusual to frighten him."

I acquiesced with a nod.

"We may take it, I think, that such a man would not be terrified by burglars."

I admitted this assumption.

"He was looking at the curtains which were drawn across the window— that is a point to remember," said the professor, marking off this fact by holding up a finger. "Then the little boxes; did you count them?"

"Yes, there were twenty-five."

"And the last one was unopened; did you open it?"

"Yes; it contained a minute head in ivory, wonderfully carved."

"I did not touch the box," said Quarles, "but if the toy was complete it would naturally contain such a head. Did you notice the nineteenth box?"

"Not particularly."

"Had you done so you would have noticed that it was discolored like the first and largest one, not clean and white like the others— and more, beginning from the nineteenth box the semi-circular arrangement was broken, as though it had been completed in a hurry, and possibly by different hands."

I did not make any comment.

"The largest box had become discolored because it was the outside one, always exposed; I judged therefore that the nineteenth box was discolored for the same reason. For some time it had been the outside box of the last few boxes. In other words, the toy in Mr. Ratcliffe's possession had not been a complete one. This led me to look at box eighteen, the last in Mr. Ratcliffe's series; it was just the size to contain the sapphire. This suggested that the sapphire was the central point of the mystery."

"You think the thieves were disturbed?"

"No."

"Then why didn't they take the sapphire?"

"Exactly. By the way, is the stone still at Scotland Yard?"

"Yes."

"Has it been tested?"

"No."

"Have it examined by the most expert man you can find. I think you will find it is paste, a wonderful imitation, capable of standing some tests— but still paste."

"Then why did Mr. Ratcliffe— an expert in gems, remember— treasure it so carefully?" I asked.

"He didn't," Quarles answered shortly. "It is obvious that a man who possessed such stones as were found in that packet at the bank would certainly not make such a mistake; yet he was apparently playing with his treasure when he met his death. My theory had three points, you see. First, the sapphire was the sole object of the robbery; secondly, the thieves had substituted an exact duplicate for the real stone; thirdly, the stone must have some special fascination for Mr. Ratcliffe, or he would have put it in the bank for safety as he had done with others."

"An interesting theory, I admit, but—"

"Wait, Mr. Wigan. I have said something about my methods. I began to look for facts to support my theory. You remember the cook-housekeeper?"

"Perfectly."

"She spoke of her uncle's sensitiveness to noises; she had on one or two occasions surprised him in a listening attitude. That gave me a clew. What was he listening for? Mr. Ratcliffe had only given way to this listening attitude recently; in fact, only since his return from his last voyage. It would seem that since his return his mental balance had become unstable. There was some constant irritation in his brain which brought fear, and in his dead eyes there was terror. My theory was complete; I had only to fit the facts into it. I suppose, Mr. Wigan, you have found out all about the people living on either side of Ratcliffe's house?"

"Both are families above suspicion," I answered. "I also tried Ossery Road, the gardens of which run down to those on that side of Blenheim Square. The house immediately behind No. 12 is occupied by a doctor."

"I know. I called upon him recently to put some scientific point to him," said Quarles with a smile. "I came to the conclusion that he could give me no information about Mr. Ratcliffe. Rather curiously, he did not like Mr. Ratcliffe."

"So I discovered," I answered, and I was conscious of resenting the professor's active interference in the case. There is no telling what damage an amateur may do.

"His dislike was a solid fact," said Quarles. "I congratulate you on not being put on a false scent by it. Many detectives would have been. The gardens end on to each other— a doctor, a knowledge of subtle poisons— oh, there were materials for an excellent case ready to hand."

"We are getting away from the point, professor," I said, somewhat tartly.

"No, I am coming to it. I concentrated my attention on the house two doors further down the road. It would not be difficult to creep along the garden wall even in the dark. Two Chinese gentlemen boarded there, I was told. No one had noticed them very particularly in the neighborhood. There are several boarding-houses in Ossery Road, and many foreigners over here for study or upon business go to live in them. I called, but the Chinese gentlemen were visiting in the country, and were not expected back for another fortnight. As a fact, they were not Chinamen at all, but Tibetans, and I do not fancy they will come back."

"Tibetans. How do you know? You did not see them?"

"No, it is a guess; because on his last journey Mr. Ratcliffe wandered in Tibet. I have correspondents in Northern India, and it was not very difficult to get this information by cable. You do not know Tibet, Mr. Wigan?"

"No."

"Nor I, except from travelers' tales and through my correspondents. A curious people, given to fetish worship in peculiar forms. I can tell you of one strange place, strange as Lhasa. Were you to go there presently— it might be too soon yet,

I cannot say for certain— but presently, I am convinced you would witness a scene of rejoicing, religious processions in the streets, men wearing hideous masks; and in a temple there you would find an idol with two blue eyes— eyes of sapphire."

"Two?"

"For some time there has been only one," said Quarles; "the other was stolen. You would find also in this temple talismans, ivory boxes fitting into each other, the smallest containing a little carved head representing the head of the idol. Further, you would be told some strange tales of this idol, of the psychic influence it possesses, and how those who offend it remain always under that influence which brings terror. Were you present at a festival in this temple, you would hear the idol speak. First you would find the great assembly in the attitude of listening, and then from the idol you would hear a sound, half sigh, half groan. I suppose the priests produce it mechanically— I do not know. It may be that—"

"If this be true the mystery is solved," I said.

"I think so," said Quarles. "The Tibetans followed Mr. Ratcliffe to recover the lost eye, I have no doubt of that, and to be ready for any emergency had supplied themselves with a paste duplicate of the stone. Exactly how Mr. Ratcliffe died I can only conjecture. I remember that his eyes evidently saw something, and I fancy terror killed him. The Tibetans had undoubtedly watched him constantly, and had found out that he had the stone hidden in the boxes. Probably they expected to find it so hidden, having discovered that Mr. Ratcliffe had discarded the inner boxes of the talisman at the time of the robbery. Having made certain of this, I think that on the fatal night they made the curious sound that the idol makes when speaking, expecting that he would be listening for it, as their priests declared those who offended the god always did, and as a curious fact Mr. Ratcliffe actually was, remember; then possibly they thrust between the curtains one of those hideous masks which figure in so many religious ceremonies in Tibet. Mr. Ratcliffe was in a state of mind to give any sudden terror an enormous power over him, and I think he died without any violence being offered him. So the gem was recovered, the paste sapphire and the remaining boxes being left as a sign that the god had been avenged, a sign which I believe I have been able to read. There are the theory and some facts; you must make further inquiries yourself."

The professor rose abruptly from his chair. Evidently he had no intention of answering questions, and he meant the interview to come to an end.

"Thank you," I said. "I shall take steps at once to find out if you are correct."

"For your own satisfaction, not mine," said Quarles; "I am certain. You asked how it was I came to Blenheim Square that morning. Chance! It is called that. I do not believe in chance. When I am impelled to do a thing, I do it because I recognize a directing will I am forced to obey. We live in a world girt with miracles, in an atmosphere of mystery which is beyond our comprehension. We find names for what we do not understand, psychic force, mind waves, telepathy, and the like,

but they are only names and do not help us much. Keep an open mind, Mr. Wigan; you will be astonished what strange imaginings will enter it— imaginings which you will discover are real truths. An empty mind in an empty room, there you have the best receptacle for that great will which guides and governs all thought and action. I speak as a philosopher, and as an old man to a young one. Come to me if you like when you are in a difficulty, and I will help you if I am allowed to. Do you understand? Good-bye."

SUBSEQUENT inquiries made by Scotland Yard through the authorities in India established the fact that the sapphire eye of the image in Tibet had been stolen; that Mr. Ratcliffe was in Tibet at the time; and that not long after the tragedy in Blenheim Square the jewel was restored to its place with much rejoicing and religious enthusiasm.

I was not disposed to like Professor Quarles nor to believe in him altogether. I found it easy to see the charlatan in him, yet the fact remained that he had solved the problem.

Certainly he was interesting, and, besides, there was his granddaughter, Zena. If only for the sake of seeing her, I felt sure I should have occasion to consult Christopher Quarles again.

End